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<http://arabicgems.wordpress.com>

Note: I do not necessarily agree with every thing posted here and may even differ on some issues but these are being posted as they are except minor changes in a couple of headings and minor format improvement in a few posts. This is being presented just for education purposes and backup purposes and readers are suggested to independently verify the posts.

Oldest posts are mentioned first

1. Precision

al-Salāmu ‘alaykum wa raḥmatullāh,

One of the most beautiful things about the Arabic language is the richness of its vocabulary and its rhetorical devices. Although the vocabulary is only rich in culturally-specific areas, it does indeed excel in them.

Ibn Khalawayh said that the Arabs have five hundred names for the lion, and two hundred names for the snake. Whether these names (and others like them) are absolute synonyms is a point of contention among the linguists, but I believe the strongest opinion among them is that there are shades of differences among the meanings of each one and no two mean exactly the same thing.

Some examples of this precision in vocabulary:

A bare dinner table is called a *khiwaan* خوان. When it is laden with food it becomes a *maa'idah* مائدة.

An empty drinking glass is called a *koob* كوب or a *qadah* قدح. When it has liquid in it, it becomes a *ka's* كأس.

The wind that blows between two winds is called a *nakbaa'* نكباء.

The wind that is so soft it does not shake the trees is called a *naseem* نسيم.

The verb that describes eating all that is on the dinner table is *iqtamma* إقتم.

The verb that describes drinking all that is in a vessel is *ishtaffa* اشترف.

The verb that describes an infant drinking all its mother's milk is *imtakka* امتك.

The verb that describes milking a camel of all that is in its udders is *nahaka* نهك.

The verb that describes taking all the water out of a well is *nazafa* نzf.

It is no wonder then that some of the jurists said,

كلام العرب لا يحيط به إلا نبيّ

"No one can have full knowledge of the language of the Arabs other than a Prophet."

2. Every Letter in its Place

al-Salāmu ‘alaykum wa raḥmatullāh,

In Sūrah al-Shu‘arā’ (77-81), Prophet Ibrāhīm (*‘alayhi al-salaam*) speaks about the blessings that Allāh has bestowed upon him:

يَهْدِين فَهُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَنِي

Who has created me, and it is He Who guides me

يُطْعِمُنِي وَيَسْقِينِ هُوَ وَالَّذِي

And it is He Who feeds me and gives me to drink.

يَشْفِينِ فَهُوَ وَإِذَا مَرَضْتُ

And when I am ill, it is He who cures me;

وَالَّذِي يُمِيتُنِي ثُمَّ يُحْيِينِ

And Who will cause me to die, and then will bring me to life (again)

Prophet Ibrāhīm tells his people that Allaah is the One who guides him, feeds him, cures him, and will resurrect him. When he spoke about the first three instances - guidance, sustenance, and curing - he used the word *huwa* (‘he’), even though the meaning is complete without this word. Yet when it came to mentioning death and resurrection, Ibrāhīm did not use the word *huwa*.

The word *huwa* in these instances has been used because guidance, substance and health are often attributed to other than Allaah. How often do we hear the words, “That brother guided me to the Deen,” and “My parents provide for me,” and “The doctor cured me.” Thus, the word *huwa* has been used to indicate that all guidance, sustenance and cure are rather from Allaah,

and from no-one else. But when it comes to the issue of resurrection, nobody claims that it is from other than Allaah, so the emphasis was not needed.

3. All that has a trunk is a tree

al-Salāmu ‘alaykum wa raḥmatullāh,

There are endless gems to be extracted from the depth, breadth and precision of Arabic vocabulary, and among the many books which put some such gems on display is the classic *Fiqh al-Lughah wa Sirr al-'Arabiyyah* by Abu Mansur al-Tha'aalibi. His book is divided into two sections, the first of which is almost exclusively a lexicographical study that arranges words according to a wider quality that they share, rather than alphabetically.

The first such entry deals with words that are found in the Qur'an, and offers a broader meaning for them.

Below are some examples given by al-Tha'aalibi. I have italicised the word that is used in the Qur'an, and added a reference to some of the instances in which it is used in the Qur'an, followed by the most common translation of the word in bold. This is to compare the actual meaning with the meaning conveyed through translation. It should be noted that while these are the broader linguistic meanings, they may not apply in every instance the word is used in the Qur'an as the meaning may be restricted according to its context. The benefit of this knowledge is rather to see how the words used in the Qur'an were developed and their wider meanings.

- Everything that is above you and offers you shade is a *samaa'*. (**sky**; 3:5, 10:31)
- Every square-shaped building is a *ka'bah* (5:95, 5:97)
- Everything that crawls ('*dabba'*') on the face of the Earth is a *daabbah* (**animal, beast**; 2:164, 6:38)
- Every part of the body that one is shy to uncover is a '*awrah*' (33:13)
- Every plant that has a trunk is known as a *shajarah* (**tree**, 2:35, 7:22)
- Every garden surrounded by a wall is a *hadeeqah* (pl. is *hadaa'iq*) (**garden**, 27:60, 78:32, 80:30)
- Every difficult calamity that befalls man is a *qaari'ah* (101:1-2, 69:4)

4. A 'ayn for a 'ayn

al-Salāmu ‘alaykum wa raḥmatullāh,

As the new student begins to learn Arabic vocabulary, one of the things that immediately strikes them is that a single word will often have many different shades of meaning. This phenomenon is known as *al-Ishtiraak* (lit. 'sharing', 'association') and such words are referred to as being a *mushtarak lafdhee* **اللفظي المشترك**.

Knowledge of this branch of Arabic is important because it often deeply enriches their understanding of the wonders and miracle of the Qur'an, as well as deepening their appreciation

for the language of the Qur'an itself. Thus, it is a topic that many scholars dealt with, either in independant books devoted entirely to the subject or as chapters within other books.

One such word is the word *al-'ayn* العين. Lexicologists differed as to how many meanings this word has precisely; al-Fayroozabaadi mentions in *al-Qaamoos* that it has 47 meanings, while Muhammad al-Fasee said in his "Annotations on the Qaamoos" that it has over 100 meanings, and 17 of them appear in the Qur'an. Among its meanings are the eye, the spring [of water], the hollow of the knee, the ballista (type of cross-bow), and buds of plants.

One example of this from the Qur'an is the word *du'aa'* دعاء, among the meanings of which are as follows. The alternate meanings are in bold, and the verse as it is commonly translated is in italics (Saheeh Intl. translation) to show that the variations in meaning are not reflected outright.

1. **Worship**, as in 10:106:

يَنْفَعُكَ وَلَا يَضُرُّكَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ مَا لَا تَدْعُ وَلَا

And do not invoke (تَدْعُ) besides Allah that which neither b enefits you nor harms you, for if you did, then indeed you would be of the wrongdoers.

2. **Seeking the help of others**, as in 2:23:

دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ شُهَدَاءُكُمْ مِّنْ وَادْعُوا فَأْتُوا بِسُورَةٍ مِّثْلِهِ وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِّمَّا نَزَّلْنَا عَلَىٰ عَبْدِنَا

And if you are in doubt concerning what We have sent down upon Our Servant, then produce a surah the like thereof and call upon (وَادْعُوا) your witnesses other than Allah, if you should be truthful.

3. **Making a request**, as in 40:60:

لَكُمْ أَسْتَجِبُ ادْعُونِي وَقَالَ رَبُّكُمْ

And your Lord says, "Call upon Me (ادْعُونِي); I will respond to you."

4. **A call**, as in 17:52:

بِحَمْدِهِ فَتَسْتَجِيبُونَ يَدْعُوَكُمْ يَوْمَ

On the Day He will call you (يَدْعُوَكُمْ) and you will respond with praise of Him

5. **Naming someone something**, as in 24:63,

كَذُّعَاءَ بَعْضِكُمْ بَعْضًا الرَّسُولَ بَيْنَكُمْ دُعَاءَ لَا تَجْعَلُوا

Do not make [your] calling (دُعَاءَ) of the Messenger among yourselves as the call of one of you to another.

5. Like a crumbled mountain

al-Salāmu ‘alaykum wa raḥmatullāh,

Many languages of the world contain words that reflect certain concepts that are hard to capture by a single word in any other language. One example is the word '[ilunga](#)' in the Tshiluba language, which means 'a person who is ready to forgive any abuse for the first time, to tolerate it a second time, but never a third time.' Such words in a language can help us to understand the ideology and culture of its people, and offer insight into their principles and values.

There are many such words in Arabic, especially when it comes to religiously-orientated terms related to subtle inner emotions. One such example is the word *khushoo'* خَشُوع. It is normally translated in English Islamic literature as 'submission' or 'humility', while the English meaning of 'submission', for example, is closer to the Arabic *istislaam* استسلام. The true meaning of *khushoo'* is closer to "a state of total humility to the extent of becoming motionless, silent, fearful and subservient. For the Muslim, it carries the sentiments of emotional appreciation of the greatness of Allah, mixed with love, submission and fear." [*] Taaj al-'Aroos speaks about the word *khaashi'* (the active participle) as referring to a herb that has dried up and fallen on the ground; or a wall that has cracked, and so falls then becomes even with the ground.

Deep knowledge of the precise meanings and connotations of such words is vital to the life of the Muslim. For example, Allaah describes the true believers in the beginning of Surah al-Mu'minoon, one characteristic of whom is,

خَاشِعُونَ الَّذِينَ هُمْ فِي صَلَاتِهِمْ

translated as, "*Those who offer their prayers with all solemnity and full submissiveness.*"

But for the Muslim to take this as their aim in their prayer would be falling behind the mark, because they would not taste the full meaning of how they should be during salaah.

Yet Allaah even gives hints in the Qur'an as to how this should be, by using the same word He used to describe the believers in their prayer, to describe the state of how a mountain would be had it borne the weight of the Qur'an,

نَضْرِبُهَا لِلنَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ مُتَصَدَّعًا مِّنْ خَشْيَةِ اللَّهِ وَتِلْكَ الْأَمْثَالُ خَاشِعًا لَّوْ أَنْزَلْنَا هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ عَلَى جَبَلٍ لَّرَأَيْتَهُ

Had We sent down this Quran on a mountain, you would surely have seen it humbling itself and rending asunder by the fear of Allah. Such are the parables which We put forward to mankind that they may reflect. (al-Hashr, 21)

Such is the wonder of Allah's parables, that even though the words used in their translation do not reflect the full depth of meaning of the original word, yet the parable itself connotes the deeper meaning...that the example of the successful believer, when he stands before Allaah in his prayer, is like that of a crumbled mountain.

[*] Taken from [Contemplation: An Islamic Psychospiritual study](#) by Dr. Malik Badri

6. A little act that goes a long way

al-Salāmu ‘alaykum wa rahmatullāh,

One of the issues encountered when translating any text into another language is the extent to which [dynamic](#) or [formal equivalence](#) should be retained in the translation. One of the levels of connotation lost in translation relates to the semantic function of a word's morphology, and this is especially true when translating the Qur'an into English.

This concept can be further simplified and clarified by mentioning a simple rule in Arabic *balaghah* (rhetoric): **the use of a noun indicates continuity and permanence, while the use of a verb indicates the occurrence and regeneration of the act.** This can be seen on some levels in English also; ponder the difference, for example, between *huwa yata'allam* هو يتعلم ('he is learning') and *huwa muta'allim* هو متعلم ('he is learned'). Both of them refer to the same essence, but the difference is that one connotes more permanence and stability than the other.

When viewed in the context of the Qur'an, the importance of such knowledge is emphasised due to the amount of meaning it conveys to the Muslim. For example, in Surah al-Anfal, Allaah mentions the following verse:

وَهُمْ يَسْتَغْفِرُونَ مُعَذِّبَهُمْ وَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ وَأَنْتَ فِيهِمْ لِيُعَذِّبَهُمْ وَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ

which is translated into *"And Allah would not punish them while you (Muhammad SAW) are among them, nor will He punish them while they seek (Allah's) Forgiveness."*

Such a translation does not reflect the reality that Allaah articulated the concept of punishment using two different forms of word, one a noun (مُعَذِّبَهُمْ) and one a verb (لِيُعَذِّبَهُمْ). Thus, a more correct [albeit more clumsy-sounding] translation would be, *'Allaah would not punish them while you are among them, nor would He be their punisher while they sought His Forgiveness.'*

And when viewed in light of the connotations of a verb and a noun, the underlying meaning of this verse suggests: As long as Muhammad (*sallaa Allaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) is among a people, Allaah will not punish them. But since he (*sallaa Allaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) will only be among them for a short time and will soon pass away, this guarantee against punishment is only temporary (لِيُعَذِّبَهُمْ - verb). However, there is a way that the people can secure a continuous, permanent guarantee that Allaah will not be One who punishes them (مُعَذِّبَهُمْ - noun), and that is

by seeking forgiveness from Him, even if they do not do seek the forgiveness constantly and permanently (يَسْتَغْفِرُونَ - verb).

And such is the mercy of Allaah, seen through grammar.

7. There's always a first

al-Salāmu ‘alaykum wa raḥmatullāh,

Arabic often has the ability to convey a very precise meaning using a single word, due to the richness and breadth of its vocabulary. In line with this, scholars of the language would often compile lexicons based on concepts shared between words rather than alphabetically, and thus the thesaurus genre in Arabic literature could be seen as early as the 9th Century, predating the first English [thesaurus](#) by approximately nine centuries.

Early on in his book *Fiqh al-Lughah wa Sirr al-'Arabiyyah*, al-Tha'aalibee presents an exposition of the words that deals with the 'first of...' matters in Arabic. Among these are:

The first light of the day is known as the *subh* الصُّبْح

The first dark of the night is known as the *ghasaq* الغَسَق

The first drizzle of the rain is known as the *wasmiyy* الوَسْمِيّ

The first milk from the udder is known as the *libaa'* اللَّبَاء'

The first juice extracted from a fruit is known as the *sulaaf* السَّلَاف

The first faction of the army is known as the *talee'ah* الطَّلِيعَة

The first signs of sleep is known as the *nu'aas* النُّعَاس

The first hours of the night are known as the *zulaf* الزُّلْف

The first signs of water in a well once it has been dug is known as the *nabat* النَّبَات

The first garment worn by an infant is known as the *'ilqah* الْعِلْقَة

The first cry of the baby when he is born is known as the *istihlaal* الْإِسْتِهْلَال

The first waste to come out of the child's body is known as the *'iqyu* الْعَقْيُ

8. A tree, sent down from above

al-Salāmu ‘alaykum wa raḥmatullāh,

One of phenomena that is immediately noticed among learners of Arabic is that its lexicon resembles a tree wherein some words are built on and branch out from others that usually take the form of tri-consonantal roots. This etymological phenomenon in Arabic is known as *al-Ishtiqaq* and there are various theories regarding the complexity of it; this post will cover the aspect that all the scholars of Arabic agree upon completely.

The most well-known example in this is the case of the root letters *jeem-noon* ج-ن, the general meaning of which indicates something that is concealed or hidden to the eye. From this root branch out the words:

- *jinn* جِنُّ referring to the other form of creation that share the world with us whom are concealed from our sight
- *junnah* جُنَّة referring to a shield, for it conceals parts of the user from the sight of others
- *janeen* جَنِين referring to a fetus, which is concealed in the womb
- the verb *ajanna* أَجَنَّ referring to the act of concealment, as in the phrase *ajannahu al-laylu* أَجَنَّهُ اللَّيْلُ meaning ‘he was concealed by [the darkness of] the night.’

A less known antithetical root is that of *hamzah-noon-seen* ه-ن-س, the general meaning of which indicates something that is clear and plain to the eyes. Words branching from this root include:

- *al-ins* الْإِنْسُ referring to the human, because they can be seen (as opposed to the jinn who cannot)^[1]
- The verb *aanasa* آَنَّسَ which means to perceive something, as in the saying of Musa (‘*alayhi al-salaam*) in surah Ta-Ha, verse 10,

أَنْسَتُ نَارًا إِنِّي إِذْ رَأَيْ نَارًا فَقَالَ لِأَهْلِهِ امْكُثُوا

When he saw a fire, he said to his family: “Wait! Verily, I have seen a fire!”

- The verb *ista'nasa* اسْتَأَنَّسَ which means to go out and look for something, i.e. seek that something is made visible to the eyes.

Although this phenomenon existed in the other Semitic languages, it was not to the same depth or breadth as it was in Arabic, and due to this many scholars of Arabic argued that the source of the Arabic language was *tawqeefi* (i.e. sent down from Allaah), although there was not a consensus on this view.

Those in support of this theory cited as proof the hadith Qudsi, after which it seems little can be said:

أَنَا الرَّحْمَنُ خَلَقْتُ الرَّحْمَ وَشَقَقْتُ لَهَا مِنْ اسْمِي

“I am The Most Merciful (al-Rahmaan); I created the womb (al-rahim) and derived its name from Mine.” ^[2]

[1] Note that some linguists argue that this word is derived from another root meaning ‘to forget’ because man is forgetful.

[2] An authentic hadith reported by Abu Dawud, al-Tirmidhi, and Ahmad

9. Strong words

al-Salāmu ‘alaykum wa raḥmatullāh,

The last post on [Ishtiqaq](#) saw how the scholars of Arabic agreed that words derived from the same [usually trilateral] root share a common meaning among them.

A number of great classical scholars of Arabic such as al-Khalil ibn Ahmad al-Faraaheedee, Abu ‘Ali al-Faarisi, and his student Ibn Jinni, understood this idea even further and suggested the notion of *al-Ishtiqaq al-Kabeer* [1] (‘the Greater Derivation’) wherein they noticed that three letters within a root - regardless of the order in which the letters are arranged - can also be said to share in a common meaning.[2] For example, the roots ج-ب-ر and ر-ج-ب and ب-ج-ر and ر-ب-ج and ج-ر-ب, along with all their derivations, would all share in one central theme or meaning, due to their being composed of the same three letters.

In his book *al-Khasaa’is*, Ibn Jinni elucidated on this phenomenon, providing detailed descriptions and examples. To continue with the same root mentioned above, Ibn Jinni says that these three letters combined connote the meaning of strength and power, as in:

1. From the root ج-ب-ر:

- *jabartu al-faqeer* جبرت الفقير to mean ‘I restored a man from a state of poverty to wealth.’
- A King is referred to as the *jabar* جبر due to the strength and power he holds.

2. From the root ج-ر-ب:

- One says about a man that he is *mujarrab* مُجَرَّب if he has gone through a trial, and strengthened by his experiences.
- A *jiraab* جراب refers to a case that protects something else (e.g. travelling provisions, or a sword) because when something is protected it is strengthened.

3. From the root ب-ج-ر:

- A *bujr* بحر affair is one which is extremely terrible or momentous.
- The adjective *bajeer* بجير is used to refer to something in abundant, copious amounts.

4. From the root ج-ر-ج:

- A *burj* بُرْج refers to a tower or fortress, due to being self-sufficient in its provisions, and power to protect those inside and within.
- *Baraj* بَرَج is used to describe an eye in which the black and white parts are extremely strong and pure in their colour.

5. From the root ر-ج-ب:

- One says *rajibtu al-rajula* رجبت الرجل if they revere a man, honour him, venerate him, and regard him with awe.

- The seventh month of the Islamic calendar is known as *Rajab* رجب because the Arabs held this month in such strong esteem that they forbade fighting in this month.

6. From the root ج-ب-ج:

- The *rubaajee* رُبَّاجِي is a man who is proud and boastful of his actions more than they deserve.

[1] While Ibn Jinni referred to this phenomenon as *al-Ishtiqaaq al-Akbar* (in the superlative form), it is usually known as *al-Ishtiqaaq al-Kabeer* (in the relative form).

[2] Note that they acknowledged it could not and would not apply to every root, just as the regular *ishtiqaaq*

would not apply to every root.

10. Two's company

al-Salāmu ‘alaykum wa raḥmatullāh,

In continuing the [theme](#) of [derivation](#), a third form was noticed among the linguists, commonly known as *al-Ishtiqaaq al-Akbar* [1] ('The Greatest Derivation'). One angle of this theory is that it went one step further and even claimed, in the presence of certain conditions, there was a link between the common meaning of two trilateral roots that shared **only two** of the same root letters.

al-Zamakhshari was enthusiastic about this type of *ishtiqaaq* and tried to derive common meanings for the roots that fell into this category. Some such attempts can be seen scattered through his work on Qur'anic exegesis (*tafseer*) called *al-Kashshaaf*. From among his examples are:

- The verbs *nafaqā* نَفَقَ ('[something] became spent, exhausted') and *nafada* نَفَدَ ('[something] came to an end', became spent) and *naḥā* نَهَى ('he drove [something] away, banished [it]') are brothers in meaning, the first two root letters of which are *noon* ن and *faa* ف. Similarly, all other roots beginning with these two letters will indicate a similar meaning related to removal, or departure.
- When the first two root letters are *faa* ف and *laam* ل the meaning indicated is one of breaking something or opening it up. Thus, one says *falaqa* فَلَقَ to mean 'he split [a thing]' (cf: [al-Qur'an, 113:1](#)), *falaha* فَلَحَ to mean the same thing, *falaja* فَلَجَ to mean 'he divided [a thing]', *fala* فَلَى to mean 'he [dissected the thing until he] examined it in depth', and so on.
- Other examples are that words in which the second root letter is a *meen* م and the third is a *seen* س all share the common meaning of secrecy and concealment. Examples of this are *namasa* نَمَسَ to mean 'he concealed [a secret]', *ṭamasa* طَمَسَ to mean '[the path or road or relic etc] became effaced or obliterated', and *ghamasa* غَمَسَ to mean 'he immersed, or sank [something in something else]'.

[1] The former type was also known as *al-Ishtiqaaq al-Akbar* by Ibn Jinni, but as *al-Ishtiqaaq al-Kabeer* by most other linguists.

11. Words are sounds of the heart

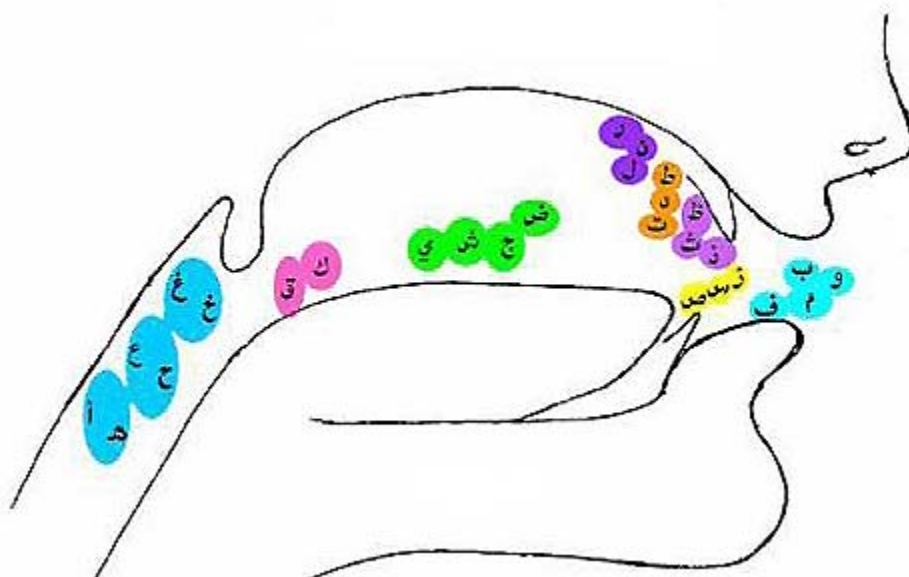
al-Salāmu ‘alaykum wa raḥmatullāh,

I thought that my previous entry on *Ishtiqaq* marked the end of the linguists’ theories on this phenomenon, but it turns out there is more.

Rather than looking at the roots as individual units, some scholars of Arabic viewed them according to their articulation points (*makhaarij*) or phonological characteristics (*sifaat*), and found that when the letters of some roots shared the same (or very close) *makhaarij*, or when the letters shared similar phonological characteristics, a link between their meanings could be found! One theory put forward in explanation of such a deep relationship between the sounds of words is that it could indicate that early communication was an accoustic expression of what was in a person’s heart and soul; as what comes from the heart reaches the heart, these accoustics were well understood by their recipient.

Ibn Jinni spoke about this phenomenon in his book *al-Khasaa’is*, and gave some examples, among which are:

- The verb *jalafa* جَلَفَ which refers to peeling something [e.g. the skin off fruit], and the verb *jarama* جَرَّمَ which refers to cutting or plucking something off another [e.g. a fruit from a tree]. While there is a clear relationship between the meaning, it appears coincidental as these two words only share the first letter in common - the *jeem*. However, if their *makhaarij* are examined [see diagram below], it strikes us that the second root letters of each word - the *laam* ل and the *raa’* ر (coloured dark purple) - both share the same *makhraj*, and the third root letters of each word - the *faa’* ف and the *meem* م (coloured light blue) - also both share the same *makhraj*!



Also compare the *makhaarij* of the following examples:

- One meaning of the word 'aṣara عَصَرَ is 'he withheld, suppressed [something]' coincides with the meaning of the word azala أزال 'he confined, restricted, contrained, withheld [him].'
- ghadara غدر means 'he acted unfaithfully, treacherously [to another]' while khatala ختل means 'he deceived, beguiled, outwitted [another].'
- When a horse neighs, it is said he ṣahala صهل, and when a lion roars or a camel brays, it is said they za'ara زأر.

Knowledge really does lead to humility, and the words of Allaah ring true [[Yusuf, verse 76](#)],

وَفَوْقَ كُلِّ ذِي عِلْمٍ عَلِيمٌ

Over all those endowed with knowledge is the All-Knowing

12. Not all questions require an answer

al-Salāmu 'alaykum wa raḥmatullāh,

There is a rhetorical device in Arabic known as *al-istikhaar* الاستخبار, which literally means 'to seek information'; in practical form, it is to ask a question and seek to know the answer. Yet there is a fine line between the essence *istikhaar* and the clothes of the interrogative (*al-istifhaam* - الاستفهام) that most people see it as wearing: the linguists say that the first time you ask a question seeking to know the answer, it is known as *istikhaar* because you are seeking *khavar* - information. Once the questioner responds, you may not have fully understood the answer, so you ask again (with a slight change in wording or without), and this is known as *istifhaam* because you are seeking *fahm* - understanding and clarification.

But as in many languages, not every question is a real question in Arabic, and the form of *istikhaar* can be used for many intents. It is especially important to regard these intents when reading the Qur'an, to fully grasp the precise meaning of Allaah's words. Some examples of this are:

1. *Istikhaar* to express the meaning of pain and anguish, as in al-Kahf, verse 49:

كَبِيرَةً إِلَّا أَحْصَاهَا مَالٌ هَذَا الْكِتَابِ لَا يُغَادِرُ صَغِيرَةً وَلَا

What sort of Book is this that leaves neither a small thing nor a big thing, but that it has recorded it?!

i.e. We are in pain that everything we have ever done, seen, thought, heard, etc. has all been recorded and presented to us!

2. *Istikhaar* to express the meaning of an affirmative statement, as in al-A'raaf, verse 172:

قالوا بلى شهدنا أن تقولوا يوم **ألمست بربكم** وإذ أخذ ربك من بني آدم من ظهورهم ذريتهم وأشهدهم على أنفسهم غافلين القيامة إنا كنا عن هذا

And [mention] when your Lord brought forth from the Children of Adam - from their loins - their descendants and made them testify as to themselves (saying): "**Am I not your Lord?**" They said: "Yes! We testify," lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection: "Indeed, we were of this unaware."

i.e. Testify that you know I am your Lord.

3. *Istikhbaar* to express the meaning of repudiation and disbelief, as in Yunus, verse 68:

اتَقُولُونَ سُلْطَانٌ بِهَذَا الْغَنِيِّ لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ إِنَّ عِنْدَكُمْ مَنْ قَالُوا اتَّخَذَ اللَّهُ وَلَدًا سُبْحَانَهُ هُوَ تَعْلَمُونَ عَلَى اللَّهِ مَا لَا

They say: "Allah has begotten a son (children)." Glory be to Him! He is Rich (Free of all wants). His is all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. No warrant you have for this.

Do you say against Allah what you know not?

i.e. How dare you speak about Allaah with no knowledge!

4. *Istikhbaar* to express the meaning of expressing a great number of something, as in al-A'raaf, verse 3:

بِأَسْنَأَ بَيَاتًا أَوْ هُمْ قَائِلُونَ فَجَاءَهَا وَكَمْ مِّنْ قَرْيَةٍ أَهْلَكْنَاهَا

And how many towns did We destroy (for their crimes)? Our torment came upon them (suddenly) by night or while they were sleeping for their afternoon rest.

i.e. 'We destroyed a great many towns'.

5. *Istikhbaar* to express the meaning of wonder and magnification, as in [al-Waaqi'ah](#), verse 27:

وَأَصْحَابُ الْيَمِينِ مَا أَصْحَابُ الْيَمِينِ

And those on the Right Hand, Who will be those on the Right Hand?

i.e. What an amazing position will these people be in!

Also Yunus, verse 50:

نَهَارًا مَّاذَا يَسْتَعْجِلُ مِنْهُ الْمُجْرِمُونَ فُلْ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ أَتَاكُمْ عَذَابُهُ بَيَاتًا أَوْ

Say: "Tell me, - if His torment should come to you by night or by day, - for which [aspect] of it would the criminals be impatient?"

13. ...Sleep...

al-Salāmu ‘alaykum wa raḥmatullāh,

As seen previously, the Arabic language is very precise in its lexical references owing to its rich vocabulary. Often a single concept may be taken - such as love, infancy, bravery etc - and different words found corresponding to the subtle differences in the degrees of that concept. And perhaps this is the basis of the Arabic maxim:

خَيْرُ الْكَلَامِ مَا قَلَّ وَدَلَّ

The best of speech is that which has the fewest words while retaining the desired meaning for only one well-versed in the subtleties of the vocabulary would be able to achieve this.

It is especially important to be aware of these subtleties when their words appear in the Qur'an, for only then can one understand the true nature of the message. In this regard, I present the degrees of sleep in Arabic:

1. *al-nu'aas* النُّعَاس - this is when a person's eyes becomes tired or drowsy and feels the need for sleep. This word was used by Allaah when he gave the Muslims at the [Battle of Badr](#) a break before the fighting began to strengthen them, as mentioned in [al-Anfal, verse 11](#),

عَنْكُمْ رَجَزَ الشَّيْطَانِ وَلِيَرْبِطَ عَلَى وَيُنَزِّلُ عَلَيْكُمْ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً لِّيُطَهِّرَكُم بِهِ وَيُذْهِبَ أَمَنَهُ مِّنْهُ النَّعَاسَ إِذْ يُغَشِّيكُمُ الْأَقْدَامَ فُلُوبِكُمْ وَيُثَبِّتَ بِهِ

[Remember] when He covered you with a **slumber** as a security from Him, and He caused rain to descend on you from the sky, to clean you thereby and to remove from you the whisperings of Satan, and to strengthen your hearts, and make your feet firm thereby.

It is interesting to note that *al-nu'aas* was sent to them as opposed to *al-wasan*, perhaps indicating that while their eyes were given the chance to sleep and rest, their minds remained fit and alert. And Allaah knows best.

2. *al-wasan* الوَسَن - this is when the tiredness intensifies in the head, and it becomes heavy with its need for sleep. Some linguists said the distinction between *al-wasan* and *al-nu'aas* is extremely slight in degree, and they only differ in their place (*al-nu'aas* in the eyes, and *al-wasan* in the head). The verbal noun is *sinah* سِنَةٌ as in [al-Baqarah, verse 255](#),

تَأْخُذُهُ سِنَةٌ وَلَا نَوْمٌ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ

Allah! none has the right to be worshipped but He, the Ever Living, the One Who sustains and protects all that exists. **Neither tiredness (*sinah*), nor sleep overtake Him.**

3. *al-tarneeq* الترنيق which is when sleep pervades a person, without him actually sleeping.

4. *al-ghumd* الغُمُض which is a state between sleep and wakefulness.

5. *al-taghfeeq* التَّغْفِيق which is a state of sleep in which one still able to hear what others say.

6. *al-ighfaa'* الإغفاء which is a very light sleep.

7. *al-tahweem* التهويم or *al-ghiraar* الغرار or *al-tihjaa'* التهجاع all of which refer to a sleep of short duration.

8. *al-ruqaad* الرُقَاد which refers to a very long sleep, as in [al-Kahf, verse 18](#),

رُقُودٌ وَتَحْسِبُهُمْ أَيْقَاطًا وَهُمْ

And you would have thought them awake, while they were **asleep**

and [Yaseen, verse 52](#), [1]

هَذَا مَا وَعَدَ الرَّحْمَنُ وَصَدَقَ الْمُرْسَلُونَ مَرْقَدِنَا قَالُوا يَا وَيْلَنَا مَن بَعَثَنَا مِن

They will say: "Woe to us! Who has raised us up from **our place of sleep**." (It will be said to them): "This is what the Most Beneficent (Allah) had promised, and the Messengers spoke truth!"

9. *al-hujood* الهُجُود or *al-hujoo'* الهجوع or *al-huboo'* الهبوع which refer to a very deep sleep.

10. *al-tasbeekh* التسبيخ which refers to the strongest, deepest type of sleep.

11. *al-subaat* السبات which refers to a coma. [2]

[1] The *marqad* مرقد is the noun of place from the same root ر ق د.

[2] *al-tasbeekh* comes from the root س ب خ. In light of the [previous post](#) on *ishtiqaaq* note the relationship between the meaning of the word *tasbeekh* from this root, and the word *subaat* from the root س ب ت.

14. Tales from the riverbank

al-Salāmu ‘alaykum wa raḥmatullāh,

One of the most fascinating aspects of Arabic in my eyes, is finding the relationship between words that come from the same root but do not seem to have an obvious link in their meaning. The study of etymology in any language is fascinating in itself, but due to the root system in Arabic the findings are more likely to be linked to Arabic itself rather than finding that they are loan words from another language, as is often the case with English etymology, for example.

One such word that I came across was the word *jaa'izah* جائزة meaning 'a gift'. The root of this word is *jeem-waw-zay* ج - و - ز. Ibn Faaris mentions in [Mu'jam Maqaayees al-Lughah](#) that this root has two original meanings; one is related to passing through/traversing/crossing, as in [Yunus, verse 90](#):

الْبَحْرَ بَيْنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ وَجَاوَزْنَا

And We took the Children of Israel across the sea

and the other is the 'middle' of something (the *jawz* جَوْز of a thing is its middle).

So what, then, is the relationship between the meaning of a gift, and the original root meanings?

In this regard, Ibn Durayd mentioned in [Jamharat al-Lughah](#) that the word *jaa'izah* developed the meaning of 'gift' when a commander once took his army to meet the opposing force, but found a river laying between his men and the enemy. So he said to his troops,

هذا النهر فله كذا وكذا جاز من

Whoever crosses (*jaaza*) this river will receive such-and-such a thing [as a gift]

So whenever a man would reach the other side, he would receive a *jaa'izah* - or, a [token of] something that has crossed over'.

And Allaah knows best.

15. Two ends of the same stick

al-Salāmu ‘alaykum wa raḥmatullāh,

There is a category of words in Arabic known as *al-ad`daad* الأضداد. They are a type of [ishtiraak](#) in which a single word shares different shades of meaning, but what is special about the *ad`daad* is that the same word is applied to two completely opposite meanings. For example, the word *jawn* جَوْن can mean either black or white, and Ibn Faaris mentioned in his book *al-Saahibee fee Fiqh al-Lughah* that it was among the customs of the Arabs to apply words in such a way.

Sometimes such differences are tribal. For example, the *sudfah* سُدفَة in the dialect of the tribe of Tameem refers to the darkness, while in the dialect of Qays it refers to the light. Similarly, the tribe of 'Aqeel would use the verb *lamaqa* لَمَق to mean 'he wrote it', while all the other tribes of Qays would use it to mean 'he erased it'.

It is important to have knowledge of such words to better understand and appreciate the language of the Qur'an, for it was revealed in the language of the Arabs at that time, and in accordance with their dialects. Thus, in Surah Yunus, verse 54 Allaah says,

وَفُضِّيَ بَيْنَهُمْ بِالْقِسْطِ وَهُمْ لَا النَّدَامَةَ لَمَّا رَأَوُا الْعَذَابَ وَأَسْرَوْا لَافْتَدَتْ بِهِ وُلُوْا أَنْ لِكُلِّ نَفْسٍ ظَلَمَتْ مَا فِي الْأَرْضِ يُظْلَمُونَ

And if each soul that wronged had everything on earth, it would offer it in ransom. And they will **feel** regret when they see the punishment; and they will be judged in justice, and they will not be wronged.

The verse *assarroo* أَسْرُوا comes from the root *sarra* سَرَّ which refers to concealment, however this word is one of the *ad`daad* and as such, also means 'to make something clear and bring it out in the open'. By understanding both meanings of the word, we are afforded a truer insight and clearer picture of such people on the Day of Resurrection, in that their regret and sorrow at what they used to do will not only be felt in their hearts but also manifest and shown through their actions and state.

Another example lies in [Surah al-Baqarah, verse 26](#),

فَوْقَهَا بَعُوضَةٌ فَمَا إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَسْتَحْيِي أَنْ يَضْرِبَ مَثَلًا مَّا

Indeed, Allah is not ashamed to present a parable - that of a mosquito or what is **above** (i.e. bigger) than it.

The word *fawqa* فَوْقَهَا is one of the *ad`daad* and can mean both 'above' or 'below', and in light of the above verse, this knowledge will grant us understanding that Allaah is not ashamed to present any parables at all, whether large or small. Reading the verse with only one of the two meanings may lead us down a different trail of thought.

Yet another example of the *ad`daad* lies in the verb *dhanna* ظَنَّ which is often used in the Qur'an. The most common meaning of this word is 'to suppose' something, with an element of doubt, yet at the same time it can mean to have certain knowledge of a thing. Thus, when Prophet Yusuf interpreted the dreams of his two companions in prison his discourse indicated that he was completely certain of his interpretation. It would not then make sense to use the verb *dhanna* to mean he had doubt, in [verse 42](#) of Surah Yusuf,

اذْكُرْنِي عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ أَنَّهُ نَجَّاهُ مِنْهُمَا ظَنَّ وَقَالَ لِلَّذِي

And he said to the one whom he *dhanna* to be saved: "Mention me to your king."

However, due to this being knowledge of the future and hence of the unseen, about which none has sure knowledge other than Allaah, it is possible that *dhanna* was used here to indicate this angle.

May Allaah grant us insight into the miracles of His words - ameen. As was said by Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami, "the difference between the speech of God and the speech of His creation is the difference between God and His creation itself."

16. Antonyms in Arabic are a strange phenomenon

al-Salāmu ‘alaykum wa raḥmatullāh,

While one of the aims of Arabic Gems is to provide original content related to the Arabic language, I came across a [great article](#) in The Daily Star by Tamim al-Barghouti that I wanted to post here. It is extremely interesting, has a nice philosophical take on the reasoning behind the phenomena it speaks about, and its content is in line with the content of this site, almost like a continuation from the previous posts. You can read it below, or on the link provided above.

Antonyms in Arabic are a strange phenomenon.

By Tamim al-Barghouti
Special to The Daily Star
Tuesday, July 13, 2004

Antonyms in Arabic are a strange phenomenon. There is a whole category of words that mean one thing as well as its opposite. For example, the word, "saleem," means the one who is cured as well as the one who has just been bit by a snake. The word baseer, means one with great sight and insight, but also means blind. Mawla means master and slave and wala means to follow and to lead, The word umma, which is usually translated as nation, means the entity that is followed, or the guide, as well as the entity that follows and is guided.

Like many properties of Arabic, the reason for this is usually attributed to the Bedouin origin of the language - the desert is said to impose unity, homogeneity, and therefore equality on the all creatures. Sand is everywhere, and in the end everything turns into sand, the contradictory extremes of life seem to be the same in essence. But this traditional explanation, like many traditional explanations, does not explain much.

For Arabic is not a poor language, almost every creature, object or feeling has scores of names. A sense of continuity and unity of the universe might have been present in the desert community of Bedouin Arabs, but a sense of meaninglessness was not there. The way the ancient creators of the Arabic language celebrated the smallest details of their world is noteworthy: it is said that the great poet and linguist of the eleventh century, Abul-Ala al-Miary, who was blind, stumbled into one of the princes at the court of Saleh Ibn Mirdas, the autonomous ruler of Northern Syria. The noble guest lost his temper, especially because the poet was poor, and poor poets, are not supposed to stumble into rich nobility! So the guest called the poet an ignorant dog. Abul-Ala answered swiftly: "The dog among us is the one who does not know 70 names for the dog!" Of course the noble guest, the prince and half the linguists of the court could not come up with so many names.

Later on, in the 12th and 13th centuries, when the preservation of the language became an obsession, all 70 names for the word "dog" were recorded. They were not quite synonymous, for they did not all simply mean dog. Rather, they were descriptions of a dog's conditions; an angry dog had a name different from a joyful one, the dog that had one ear pointing up and the other down had a name different from the one who had both ears up or both ears down. What is true of the dog is true of most other creatures. Up until this day the most famous seven names of the lion are taught to children in schools all over the Arab world: Laith, Sab, Asad, Qaswara, Ghadanfar, Dirgham and Usama.

"Love" has 77 names, each of which has a slight but crucial difference from the other. Hawa means light liking but also transfers an element of error, bias and irrationality. As the old pre-Islamic proverb goes: "Hawa is the downside of reason."

Then you have ishq, which comes from entanglement, like two pieces of wood and ivory in a work of arabesque, the two lovers are inseparable yet still independent and distinct. Then there is hayam, which comes from wondering thirsty in the desert, and fitna, which means love, infatuation, passionate desire, but also means civil war and illusion.

There is *izaz*, which is the kind of love that gives both lovers power and dignity, and *sakan*, which also means home and tranquility, the Quran uses this word to describe the relation between married couples. The highest stage of love is, paradoxically, *fanaa*, which means non-existence. This is the stage where the lovers lose their independent existences and actually become one another. This stage is usually used by Sufis in reference to divine love and the unity of existence.

With this wealth of words and meanings, the existence of the category of words that mean one thing and its opposite cannot be explained by desert born nihilism and lack of imagination. Taking a second look at those lists of antonyms, one can see that, with very few exceptions, most words relate to power and knowledge. The continuous fighting for water and means of livelihood among Arab tribes, the temporality of life and the cruel paradox of the desert coupling monotony and uncertainty, might have resulted in an instinctive position on power.

Power is temporary, and is in itself meaningless. Temporary power is therefore the same as weakness, master and slave will both die in the end, so would the seer and the blind, and the blind might be more of a seer than the one whose eyes are wide open. Those couples thus deserve the same names. Power and knowledge become meaningful only if they result in something that is not temporary. To Arabs, all physical objects will in the end vanish and turn to sand, but ideas, will remain. Thus power is necessary only to create legacies, memories, epics, legends and poetry. One could trace this idea well into the pre-Islamic era. After the advent of Islam, the concept of legacy was replaced with the concept of the afterlife.

The history of Arabic literature is full of anecdotes where antonyms and puns were used to mock unjust power and authority. After Haroun al-Rashid massacred his Persian ministers, one of their women told him "*qarrat Aynok*" which is an expression meaning "may god give you peace of mind," but the literal meaning of the words is "may your eye stand still" - in other words, "may you go blind." In the Arabian nights, Shahrazad continuously addresses the angry king Shariar, who kills a woman every day in revenge for his wife's betrayal, "Oh happy king, of wise judgment" in a context that means exactly the opposite.

Perhaps today we are in great need of such words (antonyms) in everything - from love to politics.

Tamim al-Barghouti is a Palestinian poet who writes a weekly article for The Daily Star

17. In perfect form

al-Salāmu ‘alaykum wa raḥmatullāh,

One aspect of the miraculousness of the Qur'anic language lies in the precision of its words. As al-Suyuti said in *al-Itqaan fee 'Uloom al-Qur'aan*,

"It is possible to convey a single meaning with a variety of words, some more expressive than others. Likewise for the two parts - subject and predicate - of a sentence; each may be expressed in the most eloquent manner when taken alongside the other. Thus, it is necessary [in good composition] to consider the overall meaning of a sentence, then to consider every single word

that may be used to convey that meaning, and then to use the most appropriate, expressive and eloquent of those words. This is impossible for man to do consistently, or even most of the time, but it is well within the Knowledge of Allaah [whose knowledge is boundless], and thus the Qur'an was considered the best and most eloquent of all speech..."

One example of this usage lies in the morphological forms found in the Qur'an, which will sometimes reflect the deeper meaning of the word itself, and upon reflection it can be found that not a single word in the Qur'an can be changed for another without it affecting the depth of meaning conveyed by the original word.

One example of this is in [Yusuf, verse 23](#):

الْأَبْوَابَ وَقَالَتْ هَيْتَ لَكَ وَغَلَّقَتِ وَأَوَدَّتْهُ الَّتِي هُوَ فِي بَيْتِهَا عَنْ نَفْسِهِ

And she, in whose house he was, sought to seduce him. She **closed** the doors and said: "Come, you."

In this verse, Allaah used the verb form *ghallaqa* غَلَّقَ to mean 'closed'. Another form from the same root also means 'closed' - *aghlaqa* أَغْلَقَ - yet there is a very eloquent reason for which Allaah used the previous form: the connotations of the pattern followed by the form *ghallaqa* are ones of repetitiveness and intensity of the action's performance, and thus the word form itself would give the reader who has knowledge of the Arabic language an idea of the intensity of the emotion and desire which drove the wife of al-'Azeez to rush around closing the doors of her house (some *mufasssiroon* (exegetes) commented that there were seven doors that she closed, and hence the form also indicates the repetition of her going to door after door closing it) so she could quickly try to seduce Yusuf. None of this would have been reflected through the use of the alternative word form *aghlaqa*.

Another example of the same form reflecting repetition is in [Surah Aal 'Imraan, verse 3](#),

الْتَّورَةَ وَالْإِنْجِيلَ لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَأَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا

It is He Who has **sent down** the Book (the Quran) to you (Muhammad SAW) with truth, confirming what came before it. And he **sent down** the Torah and the Gospel.

Although the English translation reflects no difference in the original words that were used to convey the meaning of 'sent down', a look at the Arabic will show us that the form *nazzala* نَزَّلَ was used in reference to the Qur'an while the form *anzala* أَنْزَلَ was used in reference to the Torah and the Gospel. The reason for this goes back to the manner of revelation - the Qur'an was gradually revealed in a number of stages that spanned the 23 years of the Prophet Muhammad's (*sallaa Allaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) Prophethood, as is reflected by the form *nazzala* which indicates repetition and graduality, while the Torah and the Gospel were revealed to the Prophets Musa (Moses) and 'Eesa (Jesus) at one time, as reflected by the form *anzala*.

This difference is more beautifully sealed when we look at the first verse of [Surah al-Qadr](#),

فِي لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ إِنَّا

Verily! We have **sent it** (this Quran) down in the night of Al-Qadr (Decree)

In this verse, Allaah has used the verb *anzala* - which does not reflect graduality - to describe the revelation of the Qur'an, although He previously used *nazzala*! The reason for this is clear when the word is considered in its context, as is explained by Ibn 'Abbas and others,

"Allah sent the Qur'an down all at one time from the Preserved Tablet to the House of Might (Bayt al-'Izzah), which is in the heaven of this world. Then it came down in parts to the Messenger of Allah based upon the incidents that occurred over a period of twenty-three years."

Thus, it is clear that this verse is referring to Allaah sending the Qur'an down at one time to Bayt al-'Izzah on Laylat al-Qadr, and not to its gradual revelation to the Prophet; a concept so precisely and beautifully conveyed just through knowing the meaning of the forms used in the original Arabic.

18. Down to the last letter

al-Salāmu ‘alaykum wa raḥmatullāh,

Arabic linguists of the past examined the semantic connotations of Arabic alphabetical letters according to their position in a word, and were able to notice certain trends in meaning. Although the rules are by no means to be taken as absolute, they may be viewed within the larger phenomenon of *ishtiqaq* and perhaps lend further insight into its mechanics.

Some of what was noticed was the following:

1. When the letter *taa*’ ت is the second root letter of a word, it affords the meaning of cutting or severance, for example:

batara al-yad بتر اليد means ‘he amputated the hand’
batta al-habl بت الحبل means ‘he cut the rope’

2. When the letter *thaa*’ ث is the second root letter of a word, it affords the meaning of spreading or diffusion, for example:

nathara al-maa نثر الماء means ‘he sprinkled the water’
hathaa al-turaab حثا التراب means ‘he poured earth/soil [upon something]’

3. When the letter *haa*’ ح is the last root letter of a word, it affords the meaning of dispersion, expansion, and emergence, for example:

baaha al-sirr باح السر means ‘the secret was revealed’
saaha al-maa ساح الماء means ‘the water flowed’
ṣaaha al-rajul صاح الرجل means ‘the man cried out’
faaha al-’itr فاح العطر means ‘the [smell of the] perfume diffused’

4. When the letter *daal* د is the second root letter of a word, it affords the meaning of separation, for example:

baddada al-maal بَدَّدَ المال means 'he squandered the money'
wadda 'a al-ahl وَدَّعَ الأهل means 'he bade his family farewell'

5. When the letter *raa* ر is the second root letter of a word, it affords the meaning of continuity, for example:

kharkharat al-maa خَرَّخَرَةُ الماء refers to the sound of the running stream
karkara al-jamal كَرَّكَرَ الجمل refers to the braying of a camel when it is of a continuous nature

[*] Source: *Kitab Mu'jam 'Ajaa'ib al-Lughah* by Shawqi Hamaadah

19. The classical bookshelf 1

al-Salāmu 'alaykum wa rahmatullāh,

In response to a recent request, this post will provide a list of some of the main classical books specifically related to the Arabic language from which one may benefit, be it for the sake of research or general interest. The post will be divided into categories based on the most important areas of research. The books may either be wholly dedicated to their category, or simply contain enough information related to the category to merit mention.

I apologise in advance that this list will be of more specific benefit to those who already are able to read and understand a level of Arabic. In shaa' Allaah, the regular posts will resume shortly.

Please note that this is not a complete list, but rather a general guide.

On Grammar (nahw):

1. [al-Kitāb](#) by Sībawayhi
2. [Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān](#) by al-Farrā'
3. [al-Muqtadab](#) by al-Mubarrad
4. [al-Usūl fī al-Nahw](#) by Ibn al-Sarrāj
5. [al-Mufasssal](#) by al-Zamakhsharī
6. [al-Kāfiyah](#) by Ibn al-Hājib
7. [al-Alfiyyah](#) by Ibn Mālik
8. [Mughnī al-Labīb](#) by Ibn Hishām

On Morphology (sarf):

1. [al-Tasrīf](#) by al-Māzinī
2. [al-Tasrīf](#) by Ibn Jinnī
3. [Nuzhat al-Tarf fī 'ilm al-Sarf](#) by al-Maydānī
4. [al-Mumti' fī al-Tasrīf](#) by Ibn 'Usfūr
5. [al-Shāfiyah](#) by Ibn al-Hājib

Dictionaries (Ma‘ājim al-Alfādh):

(Arranged according to articulation points)

1. [al-‘Ayn](#) by al-Khalīl ibn Ahmad
2. [Tahdhīb al-Lughah](#) by al-Azharī

(Arranged alphabetically – starting with first root letter)

1. [al-Jīm](#) by Abu ‘Umar al-Shaybānī
2. [Jamharat al-Lughah](#) by Ibn Durayd
3. [Mu‘jam Maqāyīs al-Lughah](#) by Ibn Fāris
4. [Asās al-Balāghah](#) by al-Zamakhsharī
5. [al-Misbāh al-Munīr](#) by al-Fayyūmī

(Arranged alphabetically – starting with last root letter)

1. [Tāj al-Lughah](#) by al-Jawharī
2. [Lisān al-‘Arab](#) by Ibn Mandhūr
3. [al-Qāmūs al-Muhīt](#) by al-Fayrūzābādī
4. [Tāj al-‘Arūs](#) by al-Zubaydī

Thesauri (Ma‘ājim al-Ma‘ānī):

1. [al-Gharīb al-Musannaf](#) by Ibn Salām
2. [al-Alfādh](#) by Ibn al-Sikkīt
3. [al-Alfādh al-Kitābiyyah](#) by al-Hamadānī
4. [Jawāhir al-Alfādh](#) by Qudāmah ibn Ja’far
5. [Fiqh al-Lughah](#) by al-Thālibī
6. [al-Mukhassas](#) by Ibn Sīdah

On Rare words in the Qur’ān (Gharīb al-Qur’ān):

1. [Tafsīr Gharīb al-Qur’ān](#) ibn Ibn Qutaybah
2. [Mufradat alfādh al-Qur’ān](#) by al-Isfahānī

On Rare words in the Hadīth (Gharīb al-Hadīth):

1. [al-Fā’iq fī gharīb al-Hadīth wa al-Athar](#) by al-Zamakhsharī
2. [al-Nihāyah fī gharīb al-Hadīth wa al-Athar](#) by Ibn al-Athīr

On Philology (Fiqh al-Lughah):

1. [al-Khasā’is](#) by Ibn Jinnī
2. [al-Sāhibī](#) by Ibn Fāris
3. [Fiqh al-Lughah](#) by al-Tha’ālibī
4. [al-Muzhir](#) by al-Suyūtī

On common solecisms and correct usages:

1. [Mā talhanu fihī al-‘Awām](#) by al-Kisā’ī
2. [Islāh al-Mantiq](#) by Ibn al-Sikkīt
3. [Adab al-Kātib](#) by Ibn Qutaybah
4. [al-Fasīh](#) by Tha’lab
5. [Lahn al-‘Āmmah](#) by al-Zubaydī
6. [Tathqīf al-Lisān](#) by Ibn Makkī al-Siqalī

7. [Durrat al-Ghawāmid fī Awhām al-Khawāss](#) by al-Harīrī

Allāhumma ‘allimnā mā yanfa ‘unā, wa infā ‘nā bi mā ‘allamtanā.

Oh Allāh, teach us what will benefit us, and benefit us with what You have taught us.

Ameen.

20. Discover your roots

al-Salāmu ‘alaykum wa rahmatullāh,

A common phenomenon known to linguists is that of semantic shift, whereby a word acquires new shades of meaning over time. This phenomenon is also noticeable when we take a look at Islamic terminology, such as *zakat*, or *Shari’ah*, or the Names and Attributes of Allah, or words related to the prayer such as *rukoo’*, *sujood*, *tashahhud*; they all connote a meaning in an Islamic framework that was completely unknown to the pre-Islamic Arabs.

A number of Arabic scholars of the past researched this issue and recorded their findings in books, sometimes solely related to this topic. One of the best known sources in this regard was authored by Abu Hatim al-Razi (d. 322 Hijri) which he called, “*al-Zeenah fee al-Kalimaat al-Islamiyyah al-‘Arabiyyah*.”

As Arabic was the language chosen by Allaah for His Qur’an, and as the eternal miracle of Islam lies in the inimitable nature of the Qur’anic language, it is important to study as many aspects and angles of the language as possible, to gain a fuller and more complete understanding of the Qur’anic message. Such knowledge can serve to strengthen one’s faith and bring their hearts closer to the Qur’an.

For example, when we look at words related to Jannah (Paradise):

Jannatu ‘Adn جَنَّاتُ عَدْنٍ (the Gardens of Eden): al-Asma’i said: The Arabs say ‘*adanat al-iblu bi-makaanī kadhaa wa kadhaa*’ وكذا عدنت الإبل بمكان كذا to mean ‘the camels chose to remain and stay put in such-and-such place,’ indicating that the root ‘ayn-daal-noon ع – د – ن indicates constancy in one place. Thus, the Jannat ‘Adn were so called because they are everlasting; when one is entered into them they will never leave.

Toobaa طوبى: The Prophet (may the peace and prayers of Allah be upon him) mentioned in a hadith:

Islam began as something strange, and will return to being something strange as it once began, so Toobaa طوبى is for the strangers.

Allaah said in the Qur’an ([al-Rad, verse 29](#))

وَحُسْنُ مَأْبِ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ طُوبَى لَهُمْ

Those who believe and work righteousness, Toobaa طوبى is for them and a beautiful place of (final) return.

Toobaa is the name of a tree in Paradise. Some linguists say its name was derived from the root taaba-yateebu طاب – يطيب which means ‘to be pleasant/ delightful’, as though to indicate that it will be delightful for the dwellers of Paradise to take shelter under it. The word Toobaa is of the pattern fu’laa فعلى, and this is a superlative pattern indicating the topmost end of a thing. Thus, Toobaa refers to the most extreme type of pleasure and delight; when one reclines and relaxes and takes shade under this tree it will be incomparable to any relaxation ever taken before - a reward awaiting the believers.

Kawthar الكوثر: It is a river in Paradise, whiter than milk and sweeter than honey, out of which branch out all other rivers. It is specifically for the Prophet (may the peace and prayers of Allah be upon him). It’s name was derived from the root kaaf-thaa’-raa’ ك – ث – ر which indicates abundance and plenty, reflecting the great blessings and bounty that lie within this river, as a reward to the Prophet (may the peace and prayers of Allah be upon him).

21. Purity in corruption

al-Salāmu ‘alaykum wa raḥmatullāh,

There is a long standing disagreement between supporters of classical Arabic الفصحى vs. supporters of colloquial Arabic العامية with regards which should prosper. The former group sought to avoid colloquial words at all cost, regardless of how correct they were or how well they expressed the intended meaning, while the latter group avoided unfamiliar and uncommon words claiming they were difficult to pronounce.

In reaction to this conflict there emerged a number of authors, led by Ibrāhīm ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Mazīnī, who deemed it necessary to try and bring these two factions together, by employing in their writings many words that are commonly uttered by the colloquial tongue, but which are actually correct and classical words.

There also appeared a new branch of lexicography which dealt with this phenomenon of words commonly accepted as colloquial, but with strong classical roots. Among these were *Tahdhīb al-Alfādh al-‘Āmmiyyah* by Muhammad ‘Alī al-Dasūqī, *al-Muhkam fī Usūl al-Lughah al-‘Āmmiyyah* by Ahmad ‘Īsā, *al-‘Āmmiyyah al-Fushā* by Mahmūd Taymūr, and *Alfādh ‘Āmmiyyah Fasīhah* by Muhammad Dawūd al-Tanayyur, which includes one thousand four hundred words so commonly used in speech that people think them to be colloquial words, but which are “pure, standard Arabic words, acceptable to use in writings, speeches, literature, stories, plays and the like.”

Many such words are those in which the *hamzah* ء has been diluted into an alif ا sound (more commonly) or sometimes a wāw or a yā’ sound, such as in the colloquial word *istannā* استنى (‘wait’) used in the place of *ista’annā* استأنى,

badayt بديت ('I began') used in the place of *bada't* بدأت, *jā* جا ('he came') used in the place of *jā'a* جاء, and commonly used in the construction *jā bi-al-[ta'ām* for e.g.] *جا بالطعام** instead of *jā'a bi al-ta'ām*, *shā* شا instead of *shā'a* شاء as in the phrase *Mā shā Allāh* ما شا الله instead of *mā shā'a Allāh* ما شاء الله, *wayn* وين ('where') used in the place of *ayna* أين, and so on. This omission of the *hamzah* is permissible when done for the sake of *takhfif* (ease) in speech, as *takhfif* is accepted to be one of the dialects (*lughāt*) of the Arabs.

Other examples of common words wrongly thought to be colloquial are:

Ikhsa اخس as in the phrase *ikhsa 'alayk* اخس عليك used to rebuke someone. This is actually used in the Qur'an as in the verse (23:108):

تَكَلَّمُونَ فِيهَا وَلَا اخْسَوْا قَالَ

He (Allah) will say: "Remain you in it **with ignominy**! And speak you not to Me!"

and (2:65),

فَقُلْنَا لَهُمْ كُونُوا قِرَدَةً خَاسِيْنَ

We said to them: "Be you monkeys, **despised and rejected**."

It is correct in its colloquial usage.

Idayh إديه used in place of *yadayh* يديه (his two hands). This is one of the dialects of Arabic, and is acceptable to use.

Imbārih امبارح ('yesterday'). It is used in place of *al-bārih* البارح, and is acceptable because in the Yemeni dialect the letter *lām* is turned into a *meem*, and thus they say *law mā* لوما in the place of *law lā* لولا.

Aysh أيش used to mean *ayyu shay'* أي شيء. This is an acceptable example of *naht* and is fine to use formally. It is mentioned in *Shifā' al-'Alīl* that this was heard from the Arabs.

Kikh كخ is a words used when speaking to children to indicate something is bad. It is mentioned in a hadith narrated by Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) that al-Hasan or al-Husayn** ate a date that was bought using money given in charity, so the Prophet (may the peace and prayers of Allah be upon him) said to him, "*Kikh! Kikh!* Do you not know that my family is not allowed to take charity?!"

So carefully consider your speech next time you scold a person for using colloquial words, for you may be scolding them for using pure, correct Arabic!

*Note that it is not *jāb al-ta'ām* جاب الطعام in the colloquial, as is commonly thought

** The children of 'Alī and Fātimah (may Allah be pleased with them). As Fātimah was the Prophet's (may the peace and prayers of Allah be upon him) daughter, al-Hasan and al-Husayn were his (may the peace and prayers of Allah be upon him) grandchildren.

22. The science of language

al-Salāmu 'alaykum wa raḥmatullāh,

Since the dawn of early Islam, and largely provoked by the doctrine of the miracle of the [Qur'an's linguistic inimitability](#), scholars of both Arab and non-Arab stock concerned themselves with studying the Arabic Language deeply and comprehensively. They were able to establish a range of sciences (*'uloom*) into which the letters, words, and constructions of Arabic all fell. It is important to be aware of these sciences to fully understand the depth and breadth of the Arabic language, and the various angles through which it may be studied. These sciences may be divided into three main categories, each of which is further divided into sub-categories as follows:

1. Sciences related to the letters. They fall into two sub-categories:

- i. That which deals with the articulation and sound of the letter. This is known as *'ilm al-sawt* ('the science of phonology'), or *'ilm al-tajweed* ('the science of art of pronunciation')
- ii. That which deals with the written representation of the letter. This is known as *'ilm al-harf* ('the science of orthography'), or *'ilm al-hijaa* ('the science of spelling').

2. Sciences related to the words, with regards their meaning and form. They fall into four sub-categories:

- i. That which deals with the meanings and connotations of words, and the vowelling of the words (on all but the last letters). This is known as *'ilm al-lughah* ('the science of philology').
- ii. That which deals with the manner in which these words were attributed to their objects. This is known as *'ilm al-wad'*.
- iii. That which deals with the nature of the letters of these words, with regards to any additions, subtractions, transformations, exchanges, changes in the vowelling, and so on. This is known as *'ilm al-sarf* ('the science of morphology').
- iv. That which deals with the origins and branches of the words, the relationship between them, and the manner in which some are formed from others. This is known as *'ilm al-ishtiqaaq* ('the science of etymology').

3. Sciences related to the constructions, with regards their meaning and form. They fall into four sub-categories:

- i. That which deals with the relationship of some meanings to others, and the requirements of this relationship, as embodied in and indicated by the vowel on the end of each word. This is known as *'ilm al-naḥw* ('the science of syntax').
- ii. That which deals with the characteristics of speech composition by virtue of which they conform to the requirements of the occasion. This is known by *'ilm al-ma'aani* ('the science of meanings'). This was considered the most important science of Arabic *balaaghah* (rhetoric) to the Arabs.
- iii. That which deals with the different ways of expressing the various shades of a single meaning. This is known as *'ilm al-bayaan* ('the science of style').
- iv. That which deals with the artistic embellishment of speech. This is known as *'ilm al-badi'* ('the science of rhetorical figures').

There are also a further two sciences related to poetic constructions:

- i. That which deals with the metres of poetry. This is known as *'ilm al-'arood* ('the science of prosody').
- ii. That which deals with the ends of each line of poetry. This is known as *'ilm al-qaafiyah* ('the science of rhyme').

May Allah grant us a deep understanding of the language of the Qur'an, and bless those in the past who exerted their efforts to master the language, and then simplify and explain it to us in an accessible manner. Ameen!

23. It's a hit

al-Salāmu 'alaykum wa raḥmatullāh,

The Arabs have a number of words to express specific ways of hitting. When reading the below, pay attention also to any instances of [al-ishtiqaq al-akbar](#) to increase your wonder and marvel at the richness of this language.

To hit on the front part of the head using the ball of the hand *الراحة* (the palm but not the fingers) : *صق 'a* *saqa'a*

To hit on the nape of the neck using the ball of the hand : *صفع 'a* *safa'a*

To hit on the face using the ball of the hand : *صك* *sakka*

To hit on the cheek using the palm *الكف* outstretched (the ball of the hand including the fingers) : *لطم* *latama*

To hit on the cheek using the palm in a fist : *لكم* *lakama*

To hit on the cheek using both hands : *ladama* لدم

To hit on the chin and jawbone : *wahaza* وهز

To hit on the side of the body : *wakhaza* وخز

To hit on the chest and stomach using the palm: *wakaza* وكز

To hit using the knee: *zabana* زين

To hit with the leg : *rakala* ركل

Every hit that makes a sound : *safaqun* صفق

24. A lesson in their stories

al-Salāmu ‘alaykum wa raḥmatullāh,

الْأَبَابُ لَقَدْ كَانَ فِي قَصَصِهِمْ عِبْرَةٌ لِأُولِي

Indeed in their stories, there is a lesson for men of understanding. ([12:111](#))

There are a great many examples throughout Islamic classical literature in which the scholars, leaders, and pious men of the past urged and encouraged the Muslims to learn, speak and master classical Arabic, and avoid grammatical mistakes in their speech as much as they were able. The primary reason that drove the scholars of the past to systemize the rules of grammar was the grammatical solecisms (*lahn* لحن) that were beginning to creep into the tongue of the Arabs, due to the expansion of their borders which led them to mix with non-Arabs and be influenced by their language [among other reasons] and there was a fear that this would lead to an increase in making mistakes when reciting the Qur’an, as had happened in a number of previous cases.

Thus, very early on in the history of Islam we find such examples of encouraging the mastery of Arabic, among which are:

A man went to Ziyad ibn Abeehi and complained to him that his father had died and his brother had taken all the inheritance unlawfully, but made a grammatical mistake in his complaint. Ziyad replied, “**The loss you have caused your soul is greater than what you have lost in your wealth.**” [1]

It is reported that ‘Umar ibn Yazeed wrote to Abu Moosa al-Ash’ari (may Allaah be pleased with him) and said: ‘**Learn the Sunnah and learn Arabic; learn the Qur’aan in Arabic for it is Arabic.**’ [2]

According to another hadeeth narrated from ‘Umar (may Allaah be pleased with him), he said: **‘Learn Arabic for it is part of your religion, and learn how the estate of the deceased should be divided (*faraa’id*) for these are part of your religion.’** [3]

This trend continued throughout the ages, and with the expansions of the Umayyad dynasty in the 7th Century C.E., solecisms became widespread such that they even afflicted the caliphs and leaders such as ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan and al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf al-Thaqafi. Language became a measure of status such that a man’s social standing would drop were he found to commit solecisms, to the extent that ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan was once told that he his hair had become gray very early, to which he replied, **“It is due to my fear of ascending the pulpit and committing a solecism during my sermon!”**[4] He used to view solecisms in speech to be worse than ripping apart an expensive and precious garment. [5]

Men were often rewarded greatly for merely being able to speak fluently without mistakes, even if they were undeserving of the reward. For example, the Caliph ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azeez used to say, **“A man may come to me asking me for something he deserves, but if he commits a grammatical error while asking I deny him it, for it makes me feel as though I am nibbling at a peice of sour pomegranate due to my anger at hearing his mistake. Similarly, a man may come to me asking for something he does not deserve, but if he says it with correct speech I grant him it, due to my delighting at the speech I hear from him.”** [6]

These are but a handful of examples of this nature; the books of classical literature are replete with much more of the same.

It is often said that one of the main benefits of studying history is to learn from the past. May Allaah grant us the insight and wisdom to take heed of what our predecessors urged. Ameen.

[1] ‘*Uyoon al-Akhbaar* 2/159

[2] and [3] *Iqtidaa’ al-Siraat al-Mustaqeem*, 2/207

[4] *Tarikh Dimishq*

[5] *Uyoon al-Akhbaar* 2/158

[6] *al-Addaar* p245

25. The correct combination

al-Salāmu ‘alaykum wa raḥmatullāh,

I came across an amusing anecdote in *Lisan al-‘Arab* recently illustrating the dangers of engaging in [*naht*](#) haphazardly.

It is related from Ibn Mas’ood (may Allah be pleased with him) that his wife one day asked him to provide a *jilbab* (protective outer garment worn outside the house) for her. He replied, “I fear that you will then set aside the *jilbab* in which Allah has contained you.” She asked him, “What is that?” He said, “Your house.”

To which she replied,

أَجَنَّاكَ مِنْ أَصْحَابِ مُحَمَّدٍ تَقُولُ هَذَا؟

“Ajannaka from the Companions of Muhammad (peace be upon him), that you say this?”

The word of interest here is the first one in the sentence: *ajannaka*. At first glance it could render the sentence as ‘You have been made mad by one of the Companions of Muhammad (peace be upon him)’, based on it being from the root ج - ن - ن.

However, the wife of Ibn Mas’ood actually came up with her own form of *naht* here: what she intended to say was,

أَمِنْ أَجْلِ أَنَّكَ

Is it due to that fact that you are...

But she omitted from this phrase:

- the word مِنْ
- the أ and ل from the word أَجْل
- the أ from the word أَنَّكَ

...resulting in the final combination: أَجَنَّاكَ.

26. It just doesn’t sound right

al-Salāmu ‘alaykum wa raḥmatullāh,

The sound and pronunciation of a word is very important in Arabic, and this especially becomes a problem in the case of generating new words via the *naht* process. (Although it was mentioned before that one cannot do *naht* at their whim, the council of Arabic Language has permitted cases of *naht* to be submitted to them for review for the sake of meeting with the demands of modern terminology into the language).

Some of these problems are that when you combine two or more words in *naht*, some of the letters invariably have to be dropped. But which letters are dropped and which are retained is a crucial issue, for there are a number of linguistic ‘flaws’ related to words, some of which are that two letters following each other may be considered heavy on the tongue (*al-thiqal*), or adjacent letters may be discordant or inharmonious with one another. Thus, Ibrahim Anees offered some guidelines (published in *Mujallat Majma’ al-Lughah al-‘Arabiyyah fee al-Qahirah*, ed. 30) followed by classical scholars in the words they welcomed into the language, to help us judge whether new words are harmonious and acceptable to Arabic or not. Some of these are:

1. The letters *Taa’ ط* and *jeem ج* are not found in the same word.
2. The letters *jeem ج* and *Saad ص* are not found in the same word.
3. The letters *Saad ص* and *Taa’ ط* are not found in the same word.
4. The letters *seen س* and *dhaal ذ* are not found in the same word.
5. The letters *seen س* and *zaa’ ز* are not found in the same word.

6. The letters *qaaf* ق and *jeem* ج are not found in the same word.
7. The letter *zaa* ز will not come after the letter *daal* د in the same word.
8. The letter *raa* ر will not come after the letter *noon* ن in the same word.
9. Any word from a root of four or five letters must have at least one (sometimes two or three) liquid letters حروف الذلاقة (ie *raa* , *laam*, *noon*, *faa* , *baaa* ' and *meem* م ن ف ب)

In addition to helping us judge the quality of a word, these guidelines also serve to provide much fun in trying to find those 'there MUST be some!' words that prove this wrong. I was unable to think of any, but would welcome anyone else's successes.

27. Best seen in context

al-Salāmu 'alaykum wa raḥmatullāh,

Many people who have set about to memorise the Qur'an, or portions of the Qur'an, will at some point have become confused when they come to a verse they have learnt elsewhere in the Qur'an, but with a slight change in wording or order. The key to overcoming this confusion, more often than not, lies in understanding two things: 1) the meaning of the words, 2) the context. So important is context that some linguists say that words only come to have a meaning once they are put in a context, otherwise what is to say that the meaning of *ayn* عين is 'eye' and not 'spring'?

To give an example, Allah says in [Surah al-Baqarah, verse 86](#),

يُنصَرُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ فَلَا يُخَفَّفُ عَنْهُمْ الْعَذَابُ وَلَا هُمْ أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ اشْتَرَوُا الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا

Those are the ones who have bought the life of this world [in exchange] for the Hereafter, so the punishment will not be lightened for them, nor will they be aided. (*yunsaroon*).

He later says in the same chapter ([verse 162](#)),

هُمْ يُنظَرُونَ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا لَا يُخَفَّفُ عَنْهُمْ الْعَذَابُ وَلَا

Abiding eternally therein. The punishment will not be lightened for them, nor will they be reprieved. (*yundharoon*).

Just as He says in Surah Aal-'Imraan, [verse 88](#),

هُمْ يُنظَرُونَ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا لَا يُخَفَّفُ عَنْهُمْ الْعَذَابُ وَلَا

Abiding eternally therein. The punishment will not be lightened for them, nor will they be reprieved. (*yundharoon*).

Thus He has used the word '*yunsaroon*' in one context, but '*yundharoon*' in two others.

If we look at the context of verse 86 in al-Baqarah,

تَشْهَدُونَ وَلَا تُخْرِجُونَ أَنْفُسَكُمْ مِنْ دِيَارِكُمْ ثُمَّ أَقْرَرْتُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ إِذْ أَخَذْنَا مِيثَاقَكُمْ لَا تَسْفِكُونَ دِمَاءَكُمْ

And [recall] when We took your covenant, [saying], “Do not shed each other’s blood or evict one another from your homes.” Then you acknowledged [this] while you were witnessing.

بِالْإِثْمِ وَالْعُدْوَانِ وَإِنْ يَأْتِوكُمْ وَتُخْرِجُونَ قَرِيبًا مِّنْ دِيَارِهِمْ تَطَاهَرُونَ عَلَيْهِمْ ثُمَّ أَنْتُمْ هَؤُلَاءِ تَقْتُلُونَ أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَتَكْفُرُونَ بِبَعْضِ فَمَا جَزَاءُ مَنْ يَفْعَلُ ذَلِكَ مُحَرَّمٌ عَلَيْكُمْ إِخْرَاجُهُمْ أَفَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِبَعْضِ الْكِتَابِ أَسَارَى تُفَادُوهُمْ وَهُمْ هُوَ الْعَذَابُ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِغَافِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ يُرَدُّونَ إِلَى أَشَدِّ مِنْكُمْ إِلَّا خِزْيٌ

Then, you are those [same ones who are] killing one another and evicting a party of your people from their homes, cooperating against them in sin and aggression. And if they come to you as captives, you ransom them, although their eviction was forbidden to you. So do you believe in part of the Scripture and disbelieve in part? Then what is the recompense for those who do that among you except disgrace in worldly life; and on the Day of Resurrection they will be sent back to the severest of punishment. And Allah is not unaware of what you do.

يُنْصَرُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ فَلَا يُخَفَّفُ عَنْهُمْ الْعَذَابُ وَلَا هُمْ أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ اشْتَرَوُا الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا

Those are the ones who have bought the life of this world [in exchange] for the Hereafter, so the punishment will not be lightened for them, nor will they be aided.

we would see that it is mentioned in the context of war and fighting; a context in which one is in need of support and assistance. Thus, it was more befitting to conclude the verse with *yunsaroon*.

However, in the other two verses, the same curse was mentioned, a curse of being distanced and driven away from the Mercy of Allah. How is such a person to be viewed and looked at? The word *yundharoon* connotes two meanings: firstly, they will not be granted respite at that time, and secondly, Allaah will not look at them with mercy, for if a person has been distanced from his Lord and expelled from his Lord’s Mercy, how would he be looked at?

28. Eternal regret

al-Salāmu ‘alaykum wa raḥmatullāh,

There are some commentaries on the Qur’an (*tafseers*) which have a strong linguistic element, and within such commentaries one may sometimes find that the different types of *ishtiqaq* have been used to offer a depth of meaning and insight that would not ordinarily be understood had reference to the *ishtiqaq* not been made.

One such example of this can be found in the tafseer of al-Qurtubi in which he commented on the regret expressed in verse 54 of Surah Yunus,

بَيْنَهُمْ بِالْقِسْطِ وَهُمْ لَا لَا فَتَنَتْ بِهِ وَأَسْرُوا النَّدَامَةَ لَمَّا رَأَوْا الْعَذَابَ وَفُضِيَ وَلَوْ أَنَّ لِكُلِّ نَفْسٍ ظَلَمَتْ مَا فِي الْأَرْضِ يُظْلَمُونَ

And if every self that has done injustice had whatever is in the earth, it would indeed ransom itself therewith; and they will keep secret [their] regret (*al-nadaamah*) as soon as they see the torment, and [the case] is decreed between them with equity, and they are not done an injustice.

al-Qurtubi commented that the word used for regret - *al-nadaamah* - comes from the root *noon-daal-meem* ن-ذ-م. He then mentioned that these letters rearranged form the root *daal-meem-noon* د-م-ن, which means to continue and persist in something.

Such knowledge undoubtedly deepens our appreciation of the type of regret that such a person as is mentioned in the verse will feel - a regret that is continual and everlasting, and from the chains of which they will never break free.

May Allah protect us from being one of these people. Ameen.

29. Dealing with Extremities

al-Salāmu ‘alaykum wa raḥmatullāh,

There are certain noun forms in Arabic known as *siyagh al-mubaalaghah* (‘forms of intensification/hyperbolic forms’) that are used to put across a more intense meaning than the original noun form. For example, a liar ‘*kaadhib*’ كاذب may also be known as a *kadhoob* كذوب or a *kadhdhaab* كذاب - all carrying the meaning of ‘liar’ but denoting different levels of intensity.

Allaah often uses these forms in the Qur’an, and thus we find that He refers to Himself as *al-Ghaffaar* الغفار ([Ta-Ha verse 82](#)) and *al-Ghafoor* الغفور ([al-Burooj, verse 14](#)).

Similarly, the slanderer has been referred to as a *hammaaz* همار ([al-Qalam, verse 11](#)), and a *humazah* همزة ([al-Humazah, verse 1](#)).

Is there a difference between these forms of essentially the same word? Abu Hilal al-‘Askari, author of *al-Furooq al-Lughawiyyah*, said that it is impossible for there to be two different words in Arabic that have exactly the same meaning, and that those who are unaware of the differences think that the different words are only different hyperbolic forms, whereas they also reflect different meanings.

There are two different types of hypberbolic forms:

- i. Those that indicate a different meaning to the other forms, for example the forms *al-dahhaak* الضحّاك and *al-duhakah* الضحكة which stem from the root daad-Haa’-kaaf ح-ك-د connoting laughter. To call someone *dahhaak* is to praise him, as it means he laughs alot. To call someone *duhakah*, however, is an insult, as it can mean he laughs TOO much (such as when it is inappropriate to laugh for example), or that he laughs at others alot.
- ii. Those that indicate a different level of intensity to other forms. Some of the most common *siyagh al-mubaalaghah* are (more in later posts in shaa’ Allaah):

1. *fa’aal* فَعَال - For example, *hammaaz*, or *kaffaar* كفّار ([Ibrahim, verse 34](#)). This form connotes the repetition of the action time after time, so much so that it becomes like a characteristic of the person, and this is why it is often this form that is used to refer to a person’s trade or

profession; for example, a carpenter is known as a *najjaar* نجار, a tailor is known as a *khayyaat* خياط, a butcher is known as a *lahhaam* لحام, and so on.

Thus, al-Razi commented on the word *ghaffaar* غفار in the [verse](#),

غَفَّاراً فَقُلْتُ اسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّكُمْ إِنَّهُ كَانََ

And said, ‘Ask forgiveness of your Lord. Indeed, He is ever a Perpetual Forgiver.

saying ‘As though this was His craft and business.’

And in the following [verse](#),

إِنَّا وَجَدْنَاهُ صَابِراً نِعْمَ الْعَبْدُ إِنَّهُ أَوَّابٌ وَخُذْ بِيَدِكَ ضِغْثًا فَاضْرِبْ بِهِ وَلَا تَحْنُتْ

[We said], “And take in your hand a bunch [of grass] and strike with it and do not break your oath.” Indeed, We found him patient, an excellent servant. Indeed, he was one repeatedly turning back [to Allah].

the *awwaab* أَوَّاب is the one who repents constantly and always turns back to Allah.

And when Allaah refers to Himself as *al-Ghaffaar*,

ثُمَّ اهْتَدَىٰ وَإِلَىٰ لَغَفَّارٍ لِّمَن تَابَ وَآمَنَ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا

But indeed, I am the Perpetual Forgiver of whoever repents and believes and does righteousness and then continues in guidance.

it is as though He is saying that He constantly, time after time, forgives those who turn to Him in repentance.

ii. **fa3ool** فَعُول - This form is originally used to refer to concrete nouns that are used to carry out other things, such as the *wadoo* وضوء is the water used to carry out the ablution, and the *waqood* وقود is the wood used to light fires, and the *fatoor* فطور is the food used to break one’s fast. This form was then extended to be used as a form of intensification, and thus it connotes a characteristic in a person that is concrete within him, as though he is a source and basis of that thing. For example, to call someone *saboor* صبور is as if to say that their patience (*sabr*) represents a type of commodity or fuel within them, their driving force, their motivations, and their drive - i.e. the person in their entirety symbolises and exemplifies patience.

Thus, when Allah refers to Himself as *al-Ghafoor*,

وَهُوَ الْعَفُورُ الْوَدُودُ

And He is the Forgiving, the Affectionate,

it is as though He is saying that He is full of forgiveness and a source of it.

30. The story's secret

al-Salāmu ‘alaykum wa raḥmatullāh,

To look back to the original meaning of a word is to embark on more than just a linguistic voyage; in some cases, tracing a word back to its original meaning is actually the key to unlocking one of the treasures of the guidance of the Qur’an.

For example, Allaah said in the introduction to the story of [Prophet Yusuf](#) (peace be upon him),

لَمِنَ الْغَافِلِينَ بِمَا أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ وَإِنْ كُنْتَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ الْقَصَصَ نَحْنُ نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ أَحْسَنَ

We relate to you, the best of stories (*qasas*) in what We have revealed to you of this Qur’an although you were, before it, among the unaware.

wherein the real secret behind Allah relating this story to us lies in none other than the word story itself.

The word being used for story in this verse is *qissah* قصة (pl. *qasas* قصص), is derived from the root qaaf-saad ق-ص. The primary connotation of this root is ‘to follow’. This meaning is further evidenced by the [verse](#),

وَقَالَتْ لِأُخْتِهِ قُصِّيهِ

And she said to his sister, “Follow him”

wherein the mother of Prophet Musa (peace be upon him) told his sister to follow Musa after the family of the Pharoah had picked him from the river, and the word used by Allah for ‘follow’ in the verse was *qusseehi* قُصِّيهِ also derived from the root ق-ص.

Similarly, the juridical term *qisaas* قصاص referring to the law of equality in punishment, is so called because it involves following in the footsteps of another - doing to one person what they have done to another.

And thus we find that the word *qissah* قصة (story) as has been used in the Qur’an has been chosen over all other synonyms (such as *hadeeth* حديث or *hikaayah* حكاية) because it indicates that the story is not being narrated for the sake of amusement or entertainment, but rather within the word itself lies the explanation that the story is being related for the reader to follow in the footsteps of the one being spoken about in the story... *although you were, before it, among the unaware.*

31. Don't be a hater

al-Salāmu ‘alaykum wa raḥmatullāh,

When Ibn ‘Aashoor (d. 1973/1393) wrote his tafseer on the Qur’an, which he called *Tafsir al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir*, he followed a number of basic principles in his methodology, particularly when it came to the linguistic exegesis, with which his tafseer is replete. These principles are generally based on the semantic connotations of individual words, and how these meanings relate to the context in which they are found.

This linguistic analysis is perhaps the most outstanding feature of this tafseer, and this is due to the high regard in which Ibn ‘Ashoor regarded such analysis. He himself commented in the beginning of this work,

“With regards the Arabic language, then the purpose of it is to understand the intents of the Arabs in the speech and literature of their language... the Qur’an is in Arabic, and thus the rules of Arabic [grammar] are a means by which to understand the meanings of the Qur’an. Without [knowledge of] these rules, the reader will fall into error and incorrect understanding...”

This tafseer is truly distinguished from other tafseers by Ibn ‘Ashoor’s precise linguistic analysis, in the way he shows the meaning of the Qur’anic words and their semantic connotations, and the way in which they are used in their context.

As an example of this analysis, Ibn ‘Ashoor explained the difference between the words *al-’Adaawah* العداوة and *al-Baghdaa’* البغضاء that appear in the verse, (al-Ma’idah, verse 14),

إِلَى يَوْمِ الْعَدَاوَةِ وَالْبَغْضَاءِ مِثْلَاقَهُمْ فَنَسُوا حَظًّا مِمَّا دُكِّرُوا بِهِ فَأَعْرَيْنَا بَيْنَهُمُ وَمِنَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّا نَصَارَى أَخَذْنَا
يُنَبِّئُهُمُ اللَّهُ بِمَا كَانُوا يَصْنَعُونَ الْقِيَامَةِ وَسَوْفَ

And from those who say, “We are Christians” We took their covenant; but they forgot a portion of that of which they were reminded. So We caused among them **al-’Adaawah** (translated as ‘animosity’) and **al-Baghdaa’** (translated as ‘hatred’) until the Day of Resurrection. And Allah is going to inform them about what they used to do.

He mentioned that other linguists and exegetes (*mufasssiroon*) failed to mention the difference between these two words, except for two: Ibn ‘Arafah al-Toonisee, and Abu al-Baqaa’ al-Kafawi (author of *al-Kulliyyaat*); each one’s opinion, however, contradicted the other’s.

Ibn ‘Arafah al-Toonisee held that *al-’Adaawah* is more general than *al-Baghdaa’*, because *al-’Adaawah* leads to *al-Baghdaa’*, for two people may ‘yata’adaa’ يتعادى (become enemies; from same root as ‘adaawah) with one another, but it will not lead to anything unless hatred (*al-mubaaghadah*; same root as *al-baghdaa’*) stems, then other things may occur.

Abu al-Baqaa’ al-Kafawi, on the other hand, held that *al-’Adaawah* is more specific than *al-Baghdaa’*, because every enemy (‘aduww عدو; same root as ‘adaawah) has become an enemy due to hating (yabghhud يبغض; same root as *baghdaa’*) another, but one may hate someone who is not their enemy.

Ibn ‘Ashoor then stated that he believed both opinions to be unclear, and in his opinion, the meaning of *al-’adaawah* and *al-baghdaa’* were in opposition to one another; *al-’Adaawah* is a hatred that comes from a person, who then treats the other person with aversion, or harm, or cuts off from them. This is because the word *’adaawah* stems from the word **عدو** (‘enemy’) which comes from the root *ayn, daal, waw* ع د و, and all the words of this root connote meanings of transgression and distancing one thing from another.

On the other hand, *al-baghdaa’* refers to a very strong hatred and the root **ب غ ض** only carries the meanings of hatred, so we cannot understand the real meaning of this word simply from its root.

He then turned to *al-ishtiqaq al-kabeer* to help solve the problem, and discovered that when you flip around the root **ب غ ض** you end up with **ب ض غ**, which connotes extremely strong anger. Thus, he concluded that *al-baghdaa’* refers to an extremely strong form of anger that is not necessarily directed towards a single enemy, but rather it is concealed in a person’s nafs, like a psychological state of anger. Thus, Ibn ‘Ashoor stated that we cannot say that both *al-’Adaawah* and *al-Baghdaa’* are within a single person at one time in this verse, because one is directed towards an enemy and one is not. Rather, the verse could mean ‘We caused *’adaawah* among some of them, and *baghdaa’* among others.”

And Allah knows best.

32. Submit and Obey

al-Salāmu ‘alaykum wa raḥmatullāh,

Sometimes there appear *mushtarak lafdhee* words in the Qur’an, that sound and are written the same as one another, but appear to be somewhat different in meaning, and it is sometimes difficult to make a link between the various meanings or draw them back to an original meaning. An example of this the word **دين** ‘*deen*’ in the following verses:

اللَّهُ الْمَلِكُ إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ **دِين** مَا كَانَ لِيَأْخُذَ أَخَاهُ فِي

He could not take his brother by the **law** of the king (as a slave), except that Allah willed it.
[12:76]

مَالِكِ يَوْمِ **الدين**

Sovereign of the Day of **Judgment** [1:4]

The word ‘*deen*’ comes from the root *daal-yaa’-noon* ن - ي - د, and the basic meaning of the word is submissiveness and obedience.

Thus, the word ‘*deen*’ دِينَ in its most well-known meaning of ‘creed’ is so called because one submits to the tenets of the creed and obeys them.

And if you look at Surah Yusuf, verse 76 (above), the word ‘*deen*’ is being used in its original meaning of obedience, for to follow the law of the king necessarily implies obedience to the king.

It is also possible to take the etymological process one step further and looked for a shared meaning between derivatives of the *mushtarak lafdhee*. For example, the word ‘*Madeenah*’ مَدِينَة (meaning ‘city’) comes from the same root as *deen*, and is so called because the concept of a city is based around obedience to its ruler, or person in charge.

33. Love...

al-Salāmu ‘alaykum wa raḥmatullāh,

The word ‘love’ appeared as a noun in the Qur’an ten times - of those ten, nine were using the word *hubb* حُب, as in the [verse](#),

اللَّهُ كُحِبُّ يُحِبُّونَهُمْ وَمِنْ النَّاسِ مَنْ يَتَّخِذُ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ أَندَادًا

And of mankind are some who take (for worship) others besides Allah as rivals (to Allah). They love them as they love Allah.

and once was using the word *mahabbah*, مَحَبَّة in the [verse](#) concerning Prophet Musa (peace be upon him),

مَنْي وَلِئَصْنَعِ مَحَبَّةٍ وَأَلْقَيْتُ عَلَيْكَ فَأَلْقَيْتُ الْيَمَّ بِالسَّاحِلِ يَأْخُذُهُ عَدُوٌّ لِي وَعَدُوٌّ لَهُ أَنْ أَقْذِفِيهِ فِي التَّابُوتِ فَأَقْذِفِيهِ فِي الْيَمِّ عَلَى عَيْنِي

Saying: ‘Put him (the child) into the Tabut (a box or a case or a chest) and put it into the river (Nile), then the river shall cast it up on the bank, and there, an enemy of Mine and an enemy of his shall take him.’ And I endued you with love from Me, in order that you may be brought up under My Eye,

The word *hubb* is the original verbal noun of the verb *habba* حَبَّ, while the word *mahabbah* is what is known as the ‘*masdar meemi*’ (verbal noun beginning with a letter *meem*) of the same verb. As it is the original verb, it is the origin, the *asl*, and thus it appeared 9 times. But *mahabbah* only appeared once. The reason for this lies in the difference between these two words, which can be summed up in the following three points:

1. In the nine times in which the word *hubb* appeared, it was mentioned with regards the actions of man towards Allaah, or with regards instances related to life. When Allaah the Exalted used the word in reference to Himself towards one of His Creation - Musa

(peace be upon him) - He used a different word (*mahabbah*), that was only ever used to describe His own actions, as is most befitting of His majesty.

Thus, when the love stems from mankind, the word *hubb* was used, but when it stems from Allaah, the word *mahabbah* was used.

2. The love that was bestowed upon Musa from Allaah settled in the soul of Musa and began to emanate from him just as light emanates from the sun, and its beautiful fragrance would attract the people to him and make them love him. Thus, Aasiyah, the wife of Fir'awn (among many others), immediately fell in love with him and requested from her husband that he not kill the baby Musa (see [al-Qasas, verse 9](#)).

But when humans show love to one another, it does not penetrate the beloved such that others then begin to love them also. This only occurs when Allaah loves His servant. Thus, it was only right to use different words to express these different types of love.

3. The word *hubb* is much more widely used than the word *mahabbah*. Thus, the more common word was used with a subject that is great in number (i.e. mankind), while the rare word was used with a Subject that is not (i.e. Allaah).

34. Swallow more than your pride

al-Salāmu ‘alaykum wa rahmatullāh,

It has been narrated that a major scholar of the past [1] used to try and fault the Qur'an by searching for flaws in its language. His attempts and studies lasted months, during which time a group of men would frequent his house and ask him whether he had found anything yet. Eventually, he smashed his ink pot and broke his pen, and replied, "None can dispute that this is the Speech of Allah!" He then left the house and passed by a mosque, from which he heard the voice of a young boy reciting the verse,

لَقَوْمٍ وَغِيَضَ الْمَاءَ وَقُضِيَ الْأَمْرُ وَاسْتَوَتْ عَلَى الْجُودِيِّ وَقِيلَ يَا أَرْضُ ابْلَعِي مَاءَكِ وَيَا سَّمَاءُ أَقْلَعِي
الظَّالِمِينَ

And it was said, "O earth, swallow your water, and O sky, withhold [your rain]." And the water subsided, and the matter was accomplished, and the ship came to rest on the [mountain off] Judiyy. And it was said, "Away with the wrongdoing people." (Hood, verse 44)

to which the man remarked, "It is not possible that a human could produce such words."

The verse in question is one of the most beautiful, eloquent, rhetorical verses of the Qur'an, as the scholars of Arabic *balaaghah* (rhetoric) identified within it more than twenty-five different rhetorical devices (*fann balaaghee*) within just 17 words! [2]

—
When the Prophet (peace be upon him) would pray in the Ka'bah in Makkah, the Qurayshis

would laugh at him, curse him, throw rocks at him, and ridicule him. Allaah then revealed some [verses](#) about this to ease his (peace be upon him) heart with the situation around him,

كَذَّبَ وَتَوَلَّى * أَلَمْ أَرَأَيْتَ إِنْ كَانَ عَلَى الْهُدَى * أَوْ أَمَرَ بِالْتَّقْوَى * أَرَأَيْتَ إِنْ * أَرَأَيْتَ الَّذِي يَنْهَى * عَبْدًا إِذَا صَلَّى * نَادِيهِ * سَنَدُّغُ الرَّبَّانِيَّةَ يَنْتَه لِنَسْفَعًا بِالنَّاصِيَةِ * نَاصِيَةٍ كَاذِبَةٍ خَاطِئَةٍ * فَلْيَدْعُ يَعْلَمُ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ يَرَى * كَلَّا لَئِنْ لَمْ

*Have you seen the one who forbids * A servant when he prays? * Have you seen if he is upon guidance * Or enjoins righteousness? * Have you seen if he denies and turns away - * Does he not know that Allah sees? * No! If he does not desist, We will surely drag him by the forelock - * A lying, sinning forelock. * Then let him call his associates; * We will call the angels of Hell.*

Upon the revelation of these verses, the Prophet (peace be upon him) proceeded to the Ka'bah and recited the verses openly to the Qurayshi enemies of Islam. They listened intently until he (peace be upon him) went on to recite the last verse of this chapter,

كَلَّا لَا تُطِيعُهُ وَاسْجُدْ وَاقْتَرِبْ

No! Do not obey him. But prostrate and draw near [to Allah].

By the time this last verse was recited, they all fell involuntarily into prostration as commanded in the verse, mesmerised by the beauty and truth of what they had just heard.

—

And the conversion story of ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab is a well-known one. He was one of the staunchest enemies of Islam, one of the strongest men in Makkah, who was sworn to kill the man who called himself the Prophet of God. Sword in hand, he set about to accomplish the task he had set himself and on the way was asked by a man he passed on the street as to the nature of his mission. When ‘Umar told the man of his intentions, the man told him to worry about his own sister first. In a fit of rage, he went to his sister’s house to kill her first if the news was true. He asked her whether she had accepted Islam, and when she replied in the affirmative he slapped her so hard that blood fell from her face. He noticed some paper in her hand, so he asked her what she was carrying. When she told him she could not give him the papers as he was not pure, he tore them from her hands and began to read the words written on them ([listen](#)),

الْعُلَى * تَذِكْرَةٌ لِمَنْ يَخْشَى * تَنْزِيلًا مِّمَّنْ خَلَقَ الْأَرْضَ وَالسَّمَاوَاتِ طه * مَا أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْقُرْآنَ لِتَشْقَى * إِلَّا وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا وَمَا تَحْتَ الثَّرَى * وَإِنْ تَجْهَرُ الرَّحْمَنُ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ اسْتَوَى * لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ هُوَ لَهُ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَى بِالْقَوْلِ فَإِنَّهُ يَعْلَمُ السِّرَّ وَأَخْفَى * اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا

*Ta, Ha. * We have not sent down to you the Qur'an that you be distressed * But only as a reminder for those who fear [Allah] * A revelation from He who created the earth and highest heavens, * The Most Merciful [who is] above the Throne established* To Him belongs what is in the heavens and what is on the earth and what is between them and what is under the soil. * And if you speak aloud - then indeed, He knows the secret and what is [even] more hidden * Allah - there is no deity except Him. To Him belong the best names.*

Upon reading the words on the paper, ‘Umar’s eyes filled with tears. He demanded from his sister that she tell him where this man Muhammad (peace be upon him) was, and after making

him promise not to harm the Prophet (peace be upon him) he set out to find him. The Prophet (peace be upon him) could tell who was at the door from the strength of his knock, so opened the door and greeted his visitor with the words, “Isn’t it about time you became Muslim, O ‘Umar?” to which he received the reply, “I bear witness that there is no God worthy of worship other than Allaah, and I bear witness that you are the Messenger of Allaah.”

—

The question that remains to be asked is: **What did these men have in common?**

The answer (among other things)? **They all had a deep, solid, understanding and appreciation of the Arabic language,** its syntax, semantics, rhetorical and literary devices, poetry, prose, and all else a mastery of any language entails. An understanding that allowed them to immediately discern that the difference between the speech of God and the speech of His creation is the difference between God and His creation itself. An understanding of the language that allowed them to recognise the truth and submit to it without giving another moment’s consideration to the issue at hand. An understanding that enabled them to recognise the miraculous nature of the Qur’anic text, and use this recognition as a base on which to build their faith.

Perhaps we will never be able to achieve the same appreciation and understanding of the language of the Qur’an as they did, but who can dispute that we owe it to our souls, to our faith, to at least try.

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[1] It has been said that he was the well-known Ibn al-Muqaffa’. But the narration appeared without naming the man in al-Jadwal fee I’raab al-Qur’aan wa Sarfuhu wa Bayaanuhu by Mahmood Safi (6/278).

[2] This is not a suitable place to discuss these rhetorical devices, as a background of *balaaghah* is first required. But if anyone is versed in Arabic and would like to read more, I recommend them to refer to the book *Kifaayat al-Alma’ee Fee Ayat Yaa Ard Ibla’ee* by Muhammad ibn al-Jazaree (published by Dar al-Afaq al-Jadidah in Bayrut, 2003), or to refer to *Tafseer al-Bahr al-Muheet* by Abu Hayyan al-Andalusi.

35. How the horse got its name

al-Salāmu ‘alaykum wa rahmatullāh,

The verb خَالَ *khaala* has two different forms that also differ in pattern and meaning.

The first is the verb خَالَ *khaala* (perfect tense) يَخُولُ *yakhoolu* (imperfect tense), خَوْلًا *khawlan* (verbal noun), and it means ‘to do proficiently’ or ‘to perfect’. One may use it in the phrase

خَوَّلَهُ اللَّهُ نِعْمَةً مِنْ عِنْدِهِ *khawwalahu Allaahu ni3matan min 3indihi* to mean ‘Allaah [proficiently] bestowed upon him blessings from Himself.’

This meaning also allows us to recognise the importance and status of the maternal uncle and aunt, and indeed our obligations as maternal aunts and uncles, who are called the خَالَ *khaal* and the خَالَةَ *khaalah* because they are supposed to ‘take care proficiently’ of their family. And this may be one reason why the maternal aunt in Islam is afforded the status of the mother when the mother is absent.

Allaah used it in this way in the Qur’an,

ظُهُورَكُمْ وَرَاءَ خَوَّلَانَاكُمْ وَتَرَكْتُمْ مَا

and you have left whatever We **bestowed** upon you behind you (al-An’aam, verse 94)

The second form is the verb خَالَ *khaala* (perfect tense) يَخَالُ *yakhaalu* (imperfect tense) and it has two separate meanings. The first means ‘he came to possess much wealth’ including slaves, chattel and servants. The second meaning is ‘he supposed’ and it is one of the sisters of the verb ظَنَّ *dhanna*.

Allaah also used the verb according to this meaning in the Qur’an, (Ta-Ha, verse 66),

تَسْعَى إِلَيْهِ مِنْ سِحْرِهِمْ أَنَّهُ يَخِيلُ إِذَا حَبَالَهُمْ وَعَصِيهِمْ

And suddenly their ropes and staffs **seemed to him** from their magic that they were moving [like snakes]

and in Surah Luqman, verse 18,

فَخُورٍ مُخْتَالٍ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ كُلَّ

Indeed, Allah does not like everyone **self-deluded** and boastful.

Here, the word مُخْتَالٍ *mukhtaal* (which is the active participle from the verb اخْتَالَ *ikhtaala* which is extremely closely related to the verb خَالَ *khaala*) has been translated as self-deluded and as such is related to the first meaning of coming into possession of wealth, for too much of a good thing leads one to arrogance and feelings that they are self-sufficient.

Allaah also used a derivative of this word in (al-Nahl, verse 8)

وَيَخْلُقُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ وَالْبِغَالُ وَالْحَمِيرُ لَتَرْكَبُوهَا وَزِينَةً وَالْخَيْلُ

And [He created] the **horses**, mules and donkeys for you to ride and [as] adornment.

So what does a horse have to do with any of the meanings conveyed above? The same question was asked to Abu Hatim, one of the classical scholars of Arabic, but he was unable to answer. It was reported that a madman was walking by and heard the question, so he said, “I will tell you! The horse was called a خَيْلٍ *khayl* due to the pride and arrogance (اختيالٍ *ikhtiyaal* - the verbal

noun from the verb اِخْتَالَ *ikhtaala*) it displays when it walks!” Upon which Abu Hatim said, “Note down this wise reply and pass on the knowledge, even if it is on the authority of a madman!”

A search in the dictionary *al-Qamus al-Muhit* shows that even al-Fayroozabadi wrote that the word خَيْل *khayl* means pride, arrogance, and vanity, so the madman’s reply could very well be how the horse got his name.

36. He is my brother

This post is dedicated to my brother. May Allaah protect you and have mercy upon you always habibee...ameen.

al-Salaamu ‘alaykum wa rahmatullaah,

One of the first concepts encountered by those who decide to submit themselves to their Creator and accept Islam as their creed and way of life, is that a Muslim is the brother of his fellow Muslim, and that the bonds of faith are stronger than the bonds of blood. Thus one of the first words learnt by the new Muslim are *akhee* أَخِي (‘my brother’) and *ukhtee* أُخْتِي (‘my sister’), and in some cases these become the very words most frequented by the tongue of the Muslim.

Oftentimes though, a Muslim may feel disappointed or let down by his brother, the very feeling of which is a contradiction of what a brother represents to the Muslim and the Arabs, as told in part by the etymology of the word itself.

Some linguists believe that the word *akh* is derived from the word *aakhiyyah* أَخِيَّة, which refers to a piece of rope the two ends of which are buried in the ground and attached to a small stone or stick, used to tie a horse or other animal in place so that it does not wander off. In this way should one be attached to their brother, so that they do not wander off from one another. Similarly, the brother should be like an *aakhiyyah* and ensure that his companion is kept close to the mark and does not wander too far away from it, but if it should happen, his brother shall draw him back to it.

Another group of linguists believe that the word *akh* is derived from the word *wakhaa* وَخَى, which refers to an aim, endeavour, or desire. This is because the two would share these same aims such that they are as one.

There is an Arabic proverb that states *rubba akhin laka lam talid-hu ummuka* رَبُّ أَخٍ لَكَ لَمْ تَلِدْهُ أُمُّكَ ‘There is many a brother for you to whom your mother has not given birth,’ referring to the full meaning of the word, as explained above. And indeed many can attest to the truth of this proverb.

al-Hamdu lillaah, Allah has blessed me with two such brothers to whom my mother **has** given birth, may Allaah have mercy upon them all and rain down His mercy and blessings upon them such that were each a mere raindrop from the sky, the world would be flooded many times over. Ameen.

37. The secret of happiness

al-Salāmu ‘alaykum wa rahmatullāh,

So important is the concept of ‘happiness’ in our lives that many people – even dating back to the days of the Greek philosophers – considered its pursuit to be the very purpose of existence.

Indeed, the Qur’an itself speaks of happiness as being one of the rewards of those whom Allah chooses to admit to Paradise. He says of the martyrs in Aal-’Imraan, verse 170,

فَضِّلَهُ بِمَا آتَاهُمُ اللَّهُ مِنْ فَرَحِينَ

They rejoice in what Allah has bestowed upon them of His Bounty

And of the reward of the pious believers [al-Insaan, verse 11],

وَسُرُورًا نَضْرَةً فَوَقَاهُمُ اللَّهُ شَرَّ ذَلِكَ الْيَوْمِ وَلَقَّاهُمْ

So, Allah saved them from the evil of that Day and gave them a light of beauty and joy.

What becomes immediately apparent upon reading the Arabic text (but once again obscured in the translation) is that two very different words have been used to convey the idea of happiness: فَرَحِينَ *fariheena*, which is conjugated from the noun فَرَح *farah*, and سُرُورًا *suroor*, and this is prevalent throughout the Qur’an. This is because there are two very different types of happiness being referred to.

فَرَح *farah* generally refers to transitory delights or pleasures, as is the case in bodily or worldly pleasure. For this reason, most times that فَرَح *farah* appears in the Qur’an, it is being censured, as in the story of Qarun [al-Qasas, verse 76],

الْفَرَحِينَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ

Indeed, Allaah does not like the fariheen

But when the source of the *farah* is specified in the Qur’an, as in the verse from Aal-’Imraan mentioned above, the meaning becomes restricted (*muqayyad*) and it is no longer censured.

But perhaps a greater distinction between the two lies in the manifestation of the happiness. Whereas the expression of *farah* is external and with clear outward signs, *suroor* refers to the expansion of one’s heart with delight or pleasure wherein is quiet or tranquility, and as such it has no external sign. This is indicated by the root from which the word stems – س ر *seen raa*’ - the same root as the word سِرٌّ *sirr*, or secret. So *suroor* is a secret happiness, known to one’s heart but not always seen by others, as Ibn ‘Abbas said in reference to the above verse from al-Insaan, “The نَضْرَة *nadrah* is on their faces, and the سُرُور *suroor* is in their hearts.”

Such distinctions exemplify yet another example in which the translation fails and the original prevails.

38. A runaway slave

al-Salāmu ‘alaykum wa rahmatullāh,

The Story of Prophet Yunus in the Qur’an is told only briefly in Surah al-Anbiya and Surah Saffat, although he is referred to elsewhere, such as al-Qalam. In brief, he was sent to a people whose unresponsiveness to him and his message led to him leaving them in frustration. In Saffat (37:139-140), the most high describes his departure by saying:

المشحون و إن يونس لمن المرسلين. إذ أبق إلى الفلك.
“And Yunus was one of the Messengers; when he ran to the laden ship.”

In explaining the word (أبق), some exegetes gloss it as (تباعد) ‘to move away’; (فرع) ‘to flee’; or most commonly, (هرب) ‘to run away’. In my translation above, I rendered it simply as “ran”.

But the words given as estimates for (أبق) are simply that: an estimation of the approximate meaning. They do not allow us an understanding of the intricacy of this instance of word choice and usage in the Qur’an. (أبق) is not merely to flee; it is used for the (أبق), a slave who escapes and runs away from his master.

But as we know, Yunus is not technically a slave, not through birth nor through any other means. So why the usage of the specific term (أبق)? It is, incidentally, used only this once in the entire book!

The application of the term with respect to him is justified, some exegetes say, because of his fleeing away from his people without the permission of his Lord. In this manner, his fleeing from his responsibility and the people he had been entrusted with is being compared to the slave who, instead of fulfilling his duties, runs away from his master.

Some say that the term (أبق) refers not only to a slave who runs away, but one who does so without the type of reason that might justify his departure, such as persecution or extremely difficult conditions. If this is correct, it adds a further nuance to the choice of the word (أبق), in describing the condition of the Prophet Yunus as one not warranting his flight.

The metaphoric usage of (أبق) thus demonstrates the relationship Yunus had with his master, and serves as a strict reminder to us as well. We, like Yunus, are servants of Allah and cannot flee from him nor his command.

This added insight into the *hapax legomenon* (أبق) demonstrates yet again the absolute brilliance of the language of the Qur’an; it manages to convey deep meaning and lessons to us even with the placing of a single word.

**This article was submitted by a guest writer, jazaahum Allaahu khayran. If you would like to submit an article to appear on Arabic Gems, please email it for review.*